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ABSTRACT

This book addresses the special set of communication and teaching tasks/problems faced by teaching assistants and lecturers in philosophy. Each of the eight chapters begins with an outline of the chapter's content. Chapter 1 reviews the unique problems faced by the graduate student who is both a student and a teacher. Chapter 2 discusses the various roles played by teaching assistants and the accompanying responsibilities. Chapter 3 outlines methods of becoming an effective discussion group leader, and practical suggestions for lecturing are found in chapter 4. Fair evaluation of student performance is the subject of chapter 5. Problems associated with teaching an introductory logic course which contains a large number of students enrolled is dealt with in chapter 6. The grading, tutoring, and operating of correspondence courses is the focus of chapter 7. Chapter 8 concerns problems that the teaching assistant is likely to face in his/her career, such as plagiarism and cheating. The concluding section provides resources for further reading, and Riegle's Question Classification system is appended. (SM)

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AN INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING IN PHILOSOPHY

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I. BREAKING INTO A NEW SITUATION

As each of us is transported from various phases of academic life, from undergraduate school to graduate school to faculty, we change our situation significantly. We move, for example, from an initial situation in which we have prime responsibility for ourselves to situations of increased responsibility for and authority over others. The transition stage between these two ends of this spectrum is occupied by the Graduate Student as she attempts to balance her life and responsibilities as a student pursuing a degree against her new responsibilities as a Teaching Assistant: Discussion Leader, Seminar Leader, Research Assistant or Lecturer. The Graduate Student is not completely a student (in the sense in which an undergraduate is a student) and not a full faculty member (you can easily test this by trying to get your own parking spot!) so his situation, responsibilities, and duties in both environments can sometimes become confusing or disorienting. This text is not intended to be a panacea for all the ills which may strike individuals in this Janus-like situation, but it is designed to set out clear guidelines and provide useful information which may alleviate some of the anxieties that accompany it.

Very often a new Graduate Student will find himself in the registration line enrolling with some of the same undergraduate students he is supposed to lead in a discussion/seminar group or lecture the very next day (or, very soon thereafter, we don't wish to exaggerate), having had sufficient training and experience in learning, but little or none in any aspects of teaching. We have all seen the results of poorly trained T.A.'s, stumbling through their first discussion group unable to answer even fundamental questions about the course, like: How many assignments will be required? What weight is assigned the tests and the final examination? Would I find this course interesting? What is this course about? And many T.A.'s leave such initial situations pondering why they thought they could ever lead a discussion group, let alone lecture, or even why they ever thought they were qualified to do graduate work at all. Recovering from the trauma engendered by the 'sink or swim' initiation into a situation in which twenty or thirty people are evaluating your every response, along with your hairstyle and wardrobe, could rob you of valuable, productive time and could rob your students of an able and competent lecturer or discussion leader.

This book is an attempt to begin a dialogue which will, we hope, continue to address solutions to poorly equipped T.A.'s and Lecturers. What is offered is a beginning which it is supposed others will follow and take up. The book is intended to address the special set of communication and teaching tasks/problems faced by T.A.'s and Lecturers in Philosophy. The first section attempts to set the stage by a careful sorting out of the various roles facing a Teaching Assistant, then an approach is suggested to the First Class, that most traumatic of all situations. From this beginning, the organization of Discussion Groups (Seminars) and Lectures on philosophical topics is considered, followed by a consideration of the special tasks and problems facing those destined to deal with an introductory logic course and taped correspondence courses. Finally, the topic of student relations and a discussion of general problems T.A.'s face fills out the text.

Feel free to treat this text as a starting point for your own critical discussions with faculty and other T.A.'s about the joys and bloodbaths of life as a T.A., and have fun!

This text is designed as a book and as a booklet. At the beginning of each chapter there is an outline of the content of the chapter which those with little time can read in place of the entire text. If the reader is interested in a more in depth discussion of the points listed, then she can follow these through in the full text. We welcome any and all suggestions for revisions and additions to this text. In particular we welcome any personal examples or anecdotes which could serve to highlight point we raised or introduce new and interesting problems which deserve some attention in a book like this. Fortunately much of your own expertise will come from your experience and your ability to accommodate yourself to the new situation. This book can help to alleviate some of the problems you might face but not all of them.

In reading this text you could first look at the table of contents to determine what chapters or sections are of interest, then go to the outline of the chapter and if this does not provide enough information move on to the full text that follows the outline.

II. THE ROLE OF A TEACHING ASSISTANT

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The materials in the Special Collection on the Training of Teaching Assistants were developed through the active efforts of numerous educators who first met at the 1986 National Conference on the Institutional Responsibilities and Responses in the Employment and Education of Teaching Assistants held at the Ohio State University. Assisted by more than 80 individuals, the committee chairs listed below were able to establish the collection which will be developed and maintained by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Higher Education. This arrangement will enable faculty members, faculty developers, administrators, TA supervisors, and graduate teaching assistants to have access to TA training materials produced by institutions across the nation.

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(1) Graduate students need to first sort out the roles they play in a department of philosophy. This is the first task facing a new graduate student.

(2) As a student, careful planning of your time is necessary to becoming a TA without a degree or a student without the time to develop your skills as a TA.

(3) As a teaching assistant, your first task is to get as much information as possible about what will be expected of you in the course. First, you will need to set up a rapport with the instructor of the course to determine the content of the course, the assignments required and the way these are to be weighted. It is desirable to attend lectures if at all possible to follow the flow of the course and to keep up with the pace.

(4) If your task is to teach a course or section of a course, then try to be as approachable as possible and be prepared to defend your comments or approach to the course in ways that are not intimidating to the students.

(5) Like it or not, as a teacher you immediately assume the role of expert. It is not necessary to assume that the students believe you know everything about a particular subject. Know your limitations and do not fear telling the students that you are not knowledgeable in a particular area. Try not to succumb to Grad. Students disease which may cause you to believe that you know than full time instructors of the subject. Prepare carefully for discussion groups, if you do not prepare well this will become immediately obvious to the students who quickly come to recognize a snow job.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since there is very little time between receiving your first assignment as a teaching assistant and meeting your class for the first time, there is also very little time to adjust yourself to your new role. You still maintain your responsibilities as a student, but added to that you will be an assistant to a faculty member, and also a representative of the Department of Philosophy to your students. For this reason, it is helpful to examine each of the roles you will assume in order to outline your responsibilities as a graduate student.[1]

2. STUDENT

The primary role you assume will still be that of a student, since typical regulations for teaching assistantships state that you are not to spend in excess of ten hours per week in duties connected with teaching, or assisting in the teaching, of a course. As a new graduate student you will be taking courses that will, in general, be more intensive than undergraduate courses. For this reason it is wise to plan your time carefully, so that you keep up with the material and the course work for each of your classes. It is too easy to let your course work slide to a gradual halt in favour of other activities. If this happens, you will not only wind up in a mad rush to finish during the summer term, but you may also jeopardize your chances of getting a scholarship or a further teaching assistantship. Keep in mind, then, your responsibility as a student.

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[1] (Some of the ideas for this chapter come from: TEACHING TIPS, A Guidebook for the Beginning College Teacher, by Wilbert J. McKeachie.)

3. ASSISTANT

In this role, you will be required to assist a faculty member in teaching a course. A detailed outline of these duties will be included in later sections, but some of the more basic responsibilities will be touched on here.

First, it is important to discuss with the professor operating the course exactly what will be covered in the term. Together you can arrange in the format of a contract what your duties and responsibilities will be. It is always best to be clear (before the course begins) about exactly what you will be doing. Some of the things you might discuss are: the course outline, the text (of which you should receive a free copy), grading (including such matters as the weight of the final exam), use of discussion groups, the expected or projected size of the class and the exact nature of your responsibilities.

You should be familiar with the textbook and the syllabus before you meet the class by yourself for the first time. It is almost impossible to get up in front of a group of students for the first time with any confidence if you have no idea of what the course is about.

You should also be aware of the number and length of the assignments required. You will be interested in what your work load for the course will be in terms of marking, and your students will want to know just what they will be responsible for before the class gets underway. It is important to discuss what is required for each assignment in terms of the level of competence expected of the students. In some courses, the level of difficulty increases with each assignment, while in others, there is little change. There also might be a weighting factor so that the first assignment is weighted lighter than subsequent assignments. This factor allows the student credit for improving as the course progresses. In your first meeting with the faculty member you are to assist you should discuss whether or not you will be responsible for all the grading for the course, and whether or not you will assist in making up assignments. You should also find out if you are to lead a discussion group, and if so, how often.

In order to establish a good working relationship with the faculty member, you should become clear about your responsibilities as soon as possible and *maintain* *regular* *meetings* to discuss the progress of the students and any problems that may arise. One way to do this is to attend all the lectures for the course, if possible. This will give students a chance to approach you before and after class. It will also keep you aware of exactly what has been taught and will give you the opportunity to meet with the instructor to discuss any problems you might have. Regular meetings outside of class time to discuss assignments, midterms and any problems are also important. The first point will be covered in the next section. The second point is extremely important, since you will be responsible for grading the students' assignments, and it is difficult, to say the least, to grade for a course when you are unsure of the points covered in class.

It should be noted here that some professors do not want their TA's to attend the lectures as they wish them to remain 'neutral' or 'objective' so that they can grade the papers and assignments 'cold.' The idea seems to be that the students would have two separate and distinct approaches or appraisals (provided there is still some consultation between TA and faculty) to their work and the material of the course. This approach will probably only be attempted at a later stage of a graduate student's development, such as at the later stages of an M.A. or a Ph.D. It also requires that the TA for the course have a thorough understanding of the material of the course and that she also be well aware of the instructor's interpretation of this material. This approach is not one to be generally recommended as it tends to decrease the TA's involvement with the students in the course, and this is a very important part of being a TA. (This is discussed in more detail below.) It also tends to create problems in marking because you are never exactly sure what was discussed in class and to what extent. Further, it is difficult to help students who have misunderstood a turn of phrase or term used in the lectures in a particular context, or who have been misled by a casual remark made in class. The instructor may give you a clear idea of what has been happening in the classroom, but for him to explain exactly what has been said would probably take more time than if you actually attended the class.

The most important aspect to being an assistant to a faculty member is to maintain communication about the progress of the course. This gives you some insight into the preparation involved in teaching a university course which will prove valuable.

4. TEACHER

In accepting a position as a teaching assistant, you will have some responsibilities to the students in the class. You must be well informed on the material covered in the course and also know about the technical details such as the weight of each assignment, when assignments are due, etc. You must ensure that the students know your office number and the hours when you will be available.

It is very important to be approachable. For this reason, you should try to be available before and after class, because it is often less intimidating for students to clarify problems at this time than it is for them to seek you out at your office or to raise the point in the seminar. It is also often less intimidating for a student to discuss a problem with you rather than with the instructor. This makes your involvement in the course unique as you sometimes may become a mediator between the professor and the students. Do not automatically take sides with the student if she comes to you with a complaint, as this can only cause problems. In the case of personality conflicts, it is usually best to remain neutral. (This is discussed in more detail in the Advisor section below.) You must remember that you are not just another student in the class. The students are well aware (or should be) that you will be doing some or all of the grading for the course and for this reason you should not try to be merely 'buddies' with them. You must remember that you are in a position between the students and the professor, and as such will probably be the person the students will approach if faced with a problem. At the same time, you should remember that usually the final grade is determined by and is the responsibility of the instructor of the course.

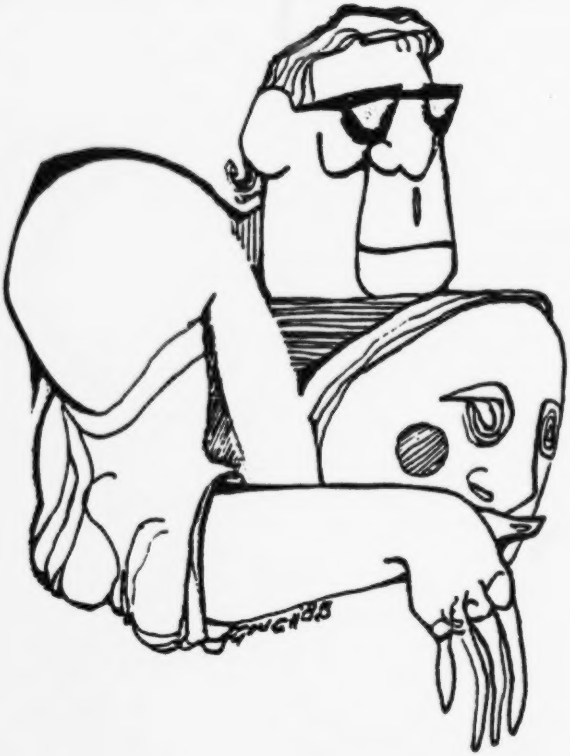
One of the best ways to define your responsibilities to your students is to remember how you felt as an undergraduate. You should above all keep the student's grades confidential. Failure to do this will result in loss of respect from all parties concerned. You should also ensure that the assignments are carefully graded (including as many comments as possible so that the student will know the reason he got the mark that you assigned, and so he will know where improvements can be made in future assignments) and handed back within a reasonable amount of time (a few days). You should always be prepared to defend your comments about a student's paper. Above all, you should remember just how devastating a sarcastic comment can be to a student. Be constructive! Your position is to help the students to learn the material and improve their ability in discussing the subject matter. (For further information on marking, see the Grading section.) And, as mentioned above, you should be available to your students and keep regular office hours (about three hours per week). There is nothing more disheartening to a student who has finally mustered up the courage to discuss a problem than to find the person unavailable during their stated office hours.

5. EXPERT

a) Who? Me! It is difficult to make the leap from student to expert because you will find that you have suddenly acquired a new label. You must overcome all the problems that ensue, before you can be comfortable with your new situation. In courses you took as an undergraduate, you may have thought about how you would have reacted in a given situation if you had been the instructor. Now is your chance! Part of the control of the class will now rest on your shoulders, and as you are assisting a faculty member, you will discover just how many considerations must be taken into account for an individual course. This problem seems to be akin to one that new parents face; they have thought about how their parents raised them, and about mistakes they think they should avoid, yet they find themselves confronted with so many issues they were previously unaware of that they feel completely overwhelmed. It is important to examine what you feel about accepting this role as a TA, and the extent to which you may consider yourself an expert.

As a graduate student you will have taken many courses in philosophy. But up to this point, it is likely that you have only had to defend your knowledge on paper, and have not had much experience in explaining the subject matter to others who are less involved in the subject. You are probably also inexperienced in answering the type of questions that undergraduates are likely to ask of you. While it is not necessary to spend all your waking hours doing research in the topic of the course for which you are a TA, it is useful to read the text for the course carefully (and maybe also some secondary material) to prepare yourself. It is best to try to keep slightly ahead of what is happening in the classroom to give yourself a chance to focus on the direction of the course.

b) The Extent of Your Expertise: When you acquire the responsibilities of a TA, you also assume the role of expert. When you take on this label, you will be concerned about the extent to which you are an expert. You might ask yourself how far your limited expertise extends when compared to that of established teachers, or how far it extends beyond that of a knowledgeable undergraduate. You might wonder if you should feign expertise when you obviously don't have it, or if you should defer any expertise to those who are older and wiser.



The students in the class will rely upon you as an authority on the subject since you have been assigned to help answer their questions and to mark their assignments. You will find that most students will not expect you to know everything there is to know about the topic. But as a TA for a course, you will be considered by the students to be an authority on the course material. However, you may be the TA for a course in which you have no previous experience. There are many reasons why you might be assigned to such a course. The most common reason is that there are some courses which attract a great number of students and so require many TA's and many instructors. It is sometimes necessary for a department to assign TA's where they are needed, which may mean that some people are assigned a course they are not interested in or for which they may not qualify as an expert. Do not look on such an assignment as penance for past sins or as the result of some monstrous bureaucratic mistake, but rather positively as a vehicle by which you can learn more about different areas in your field. By the time you reach graduate studies, you will have experience in many areas of philosophy. For this reason, learning the material of a first or second year course will not be as difficult as you first might think. Should this happen, take a deep breath, calm yourself, and explain the situation to the course instructor. (Faculty members are usually sympathetic and generally will do all they can to help you to build up your expertise. If you feel uncomfortable about approaching a faculty member, you could seek the aid of one of the graduate students in the department. Students who have been the TA for that course before will probably be willing to help you.)

It will take a little more effort for you to be a TA in this situation. You will be learning the material along with the students and helping grade the course at the same time. It would certainly be best for you to try to keep ahead of what is being done in the classroom. Doing so will help you to feel confident about the material, and will make your job much easier. (Remember that others have been in this situation before you.)

c) Graduate Students' Disease: This disease is not identified by physical conditions such as black circles under the eyes or hunched shoulders (even though many graduate students display these symptoms); rather it is a condition that some TA's develop when first confronted with the authority that comes from their new position. Up to this point, we have been discussing ways to ease into the role of expert when you first feel ill at ease doing so. For some, this is not a problem at all since they feel that they are already more qualified to teach the course than the instructor. What most graduate students should (and usually do) realize is that the instructor generally not only has more knowledge about the subject matter of the course, but also has far more experience in teaching it as well. It is possible to keep learning about a course for which you are a TA, even if you have assisted for that course before. As you well know from taking undergraduate courses, a term course does not exhaust all that there is to know about a particular topic. By being a TA for a course under several instructors, you will also learn much about different teaching techniques.

The problems created by a TA who has adopted the attitude that he knows more than the instructor are great. Even if the disdain that he has is subtle or implied, it will not take long for the students in the course to pick up on it. When students realize the conflict between the instructor and the TA, they will feel divided about the authority in the course, because they will not know whose opinion to adopt. If they agree with the instructor, they may be fearful of being docked marks since they know the TA is responsible for marking the assignments. If they tend to agree with the TA, they will be uneasy because they will know at the same time that the instructor is the authority, since he is the one ultimately responsible for the course. The problem is not primarily one of competing authorities, but rather one of competing responsibilities. You might feel primary responsibility to the students and thus feel it your duty to give them 'the truth', but there are other ways to bring this about. In discussion groups, for example, you can make it clear where your views differ from those of the course instructor while at the same time not maintaining that the student need prefer your view to his view. In general, a show of tolerance to the views of others (including those of the course instructor) rather than a power play is preferable, since one would usually want to promote tolerance over intolerance.

d) The Teaching Test: Since the students will know that you are at least partially responsible for the grading in the course, they will look upon you as an expert in the topic of the course. This is particularly true if you are also leading a discussion group, or lecturing. Because you are seen as an expert, your competence will be judged by the students in various ways. This 'judging' on the students' part is a natural aspect of the learning experience, and is not something to be defensive about. Part of it stems from their concern that they get the most out of their experience at university. Part of it stems from the chance they finally get to see the experts who are doing research that they may have read about or heard about. Their concern, then, is not just that you be competent, but that you will help them become competent as well.

If you are grading material, they will want to know that you are knowledgeable in the area and that the grades you give are fair. This can be accomplished by putting in comments to elaborate on the points they have made and to direct them to other sources, by pointing out their errors gently and telling them how they can be corrected.

If you are leading a discussion group, the students will judge your competence by your responses to questions, your general understanding of the material as shown by your summaries and by the questions that you pose. One way to achieve the goal of competence here is to prepare carefully before the discussion group meets. Have an idea of what you want to accomplish in class that day, and have some sample questions ready. If you feel well prepared and ready for class, your confidence will be apparent and the students will be more likely to trust your guidance.

If you are lecturing, the students will judge you by your understanding and organization of the material and also by the way in which you present the material. Here, again, preparation helps you to achieve your goal as the ability to be convincing and clear in a well directed lecture shows that you know your subject and know how to present it interestingly.

While it is impossible to know absolutely *everything* about a subject, careful preparation helps you to feel more confident about your own knowledge, and will give you the confidence necessary to get up in front of a class. If, however, you find yourself asked a question which you do not feel you can answer adequately, it is best to admit that you cannot answer it at that point, but that you will look into it and answer the question in the next class. Make sure that you do give a response to the question later. Students will expect you to be knowledgeable, but rarely expect omniscience. They will respect you more for admitting that you don't know the answer to a certain question than they will if they suspect that you are 'inventing' a response because you have been put 'on the spot'. If you want the students to respect your competence, you must show that you will in turn respect their intelligence.

6. ADVISOR

The role of advisor can take on many different aspects. The students generally feel closer to the TA for a course than they do to the faculty member. This is partly because of the closeness in age and partly because they know that the graduate student is a *student* as well as an assistant and can in some ways empathize with their situation more than the instructor. For this reason, you may be called on to be a career consultant, a course advisor, or even a counselor.

It is often difficult for a student to ask for help. This is partially because the student wants to remain independent. For this reason, it is important not to condescend to the student or to try to manipulate him. While you may not feel that you are doing either of these, it is always best to review your actions. When a student comes for advice on an essay topic, try not to influence her to take up a position that you yourself favour. Explore with her what it is that she is interested in and let her pick out a topic for herself. If a student comes to you because he is anxious about his abilities, try to maintain a feeling of mutual respect by not becoming overly protective with that student from that point on. Some of the situations that may result from this role are discussed below.

a) Counselor: Most TA's are approached at some time by a student who is looking for a sympathetic ear. Part of your job will be to listen to students' excuses for late assignments. But you may find that a certain student takes up far more of your time than is necessary with his or her personal problems. It is best in extreme cases to recommend that person to one of the professional counselors on campus. These people are trained to deal with personal problems and will probably be better able to cope with a distraught student than you, no matter how sympathetic you are. Counseling Services has a full program of counselors that deal with personal problems, study skills, and even career counseling. Many of the problems that are brought to you may be easily dealt with, but be careful not to go beyond your capabilities with extreme problems.

b) Course Advisor: Students often approach a TA towards the end of the course about other courses they might take in the Philosophy Department. Students come to their TA's for this advice because they know that they are familiar with the teaching styles of the instructors in the department and with the courses offered. Since you have been marking the student's assignments for the term, you should be aware of the level of difficulty that she may be able to cope with. This is important, since a student with only a general understanding of philosophical concepts will become frustrated by attempting to tackle material beyond her grasp.

Taking into consideration the student's level, you should find out her reasons for wanting to take another course in philosophy. Some students just want to fill in an elective with an interesting, but not too demanding, course. Others may be thinking of doing a major in philosophy and so might want a more intensive course. It is important to take the student's work load expectations into account when discussing suitable courses.

Students will generally give you an idea of their areas of interest in philosophy when asking you for information about courses, but sometimes they will come to you with no specific ideas. You could discuss with the student which areas of his own field of study he finds most interesting. You could also talk about which assignments he found most interesting in the course he has taken with you. Discussion of these points usually leads the student to settle his own mind on what he would like to take without you having to pick out a course for him by either sheer chance or your own interests.

Sometimes you might be approached by a student who has decided on which course she would like to take the next term, but is unsure of which section she should be in. This is obviously a tricky situation and should be handled tactfully. It is far better in this case for you to take a positive stance and recommend one instructor over another than to tell her to avoid a certain professor at all costs. The relationship between a student and a professor sometimes involves personality clashes, and this applies to you as well as to the student you are advising. There may be a certain faculty member that you just cannot seem to agree with, but this does not mean that your student will fall into the same type of relationship with him as you do. Try to be objective and fair at all times. Students will quickly pick up your prejudices. You must also take into consideration how a course will vary from one section to another. There may be different textbooks for each section, in which case you must take into account not just the course, but also its content, before you make a recommendation. The instructors' approaches will also differ. Sometimes more material will be covered to a lesser extent, and sometimes there will be less actual reading required, but the critical aspects will be more intensive. Finally, the problem may be simply one of finding a course to fit the student's schedule. These are just some of the factors that may need to be considered when recommending a course.

c) Mediator: Infrequently, a TA is asked by a student or students to become a mediator between the faculty member and one or more students in the course. These disputes could be about: (1) the content of the course, (2) the design of the course, (3) the style of the lectures or delivery of the material, (4) the text book, (5) the course material, or (6) the number, length or difficulty of the assignments. You may be approached by an individual student who wishes to dispute a grade or by a group of students in the class who are dissatisfied with some aspect of the course. It is generally assumed by the student that you are in a position to evaluate the course critically, since you were not involved with its conception or preparation. You are not tied to the course in the way that the instructor is, and so should be able to make constructive criticisms about its design.

Whether the complaint is made by several members of a class or by a single student (but applies to the class as a whole), you, as the T·A for the course, are in a position to assess the complaint. It is important to be clear about exactly what changes they wish to have made, as often complaints are about things that cannot be changed at that point in the course (such as having a different text). Complaints may also be completely unfounded from your point of view. If you feel the students have genuine grounds for complaint, then it is up to you to discuss these problems confidentially and tactfully with the instructor. Remember that it is not your course and also that you are not taking it for credit. Because of these factors, you can act in some kind of neutral capacity where you can temper the students' criticisms before presenting them to the instructor. The students will come to you with a complaint because they are concerned with their performance in the course. You must remember that they are taking the course for credit. You must also remember that since the instructor designed the course, it is essentially his or hers, and any criticisms must be offered tactfully and confidentially as there might be a certain amount of ego involved. It is often helpful if you can suggest some way to make changes in the course that will not be too drastic and will genuinely help to improve the course and the students' ability to complete it successfully. For instance, if the complaint is that the class is too large, you might arrange with the faculty member to split the class into smaller discussion groups once a week.

If the request is made by a single student and does not apply generally to the class, you must first of all decide whether the complaint is a valid one. If you decide that there is genuine ground for complaint, then you might approach the instructor privately at first to discuss the problem. In this first meeting, you should know already whether or not the student wishes to have his name discussed. You might then report back to the student to see if he wishes you to speak directly with the professor or to tell him of the results of your discussion. The best situation is obviously to bring the student and instructor together in some sort of constructive dialogue. Remember also that you are in a unique relationship with the instructor of the course and some of your responsibilities rest here and with the department of which you are a temporary member.

7. ROLE MODEL

Students will sometimes adopt an instructor or a TA as their role model. One possible cause of this is the successful use of the philosophical approach itself. Some students, especially those in their first year of university, may not have had any exposure to philosophical techniques since many courses at the high school level focus on retaining information rather than on developing critical abilities. (When these students are confronted by a professor who not only gives them information, but critically analyzes the theories he presents and encourages the students to do likewise. They may be impressed with the professor's skill to the point that they identify the skill with the particular person teaching the course and not with the profession in general.) Other reasons for a student adopting an instructor as a role model may be due to that person's degree of knowledge in the area being taught, her dedication to the subject, her teaching techniques, or her ability to inject humour at appropriate points. It is not just the theatrical lecturer or the 'easy marker' who serves as a role model. If you are enthusiastic about the material of the course, some of that enthusiasm may influence the students taking the course. People generally want to get more out of a course than just a high grade. If you find yourself in the position of being a role model for a particular student, enjoy it.

It is important not to just dismiss popular TA's or instructors as mere 'entertainers'. Not everyone who is popular with students is so because of an overwhelming desire to be liked. Sometimes a TA or instructor is trying to achieve his own personal goal of excellence in teaching. He also may be very concerned that each class member gets all that he can out of the course. Your role model influence may have several positive effects. It may maintain a student's interest in philosophy or in the topic of the course. It may also encourage a student to pursue further studies in philosophy, which is not an undesirable result if we believe philosophy to be a valuable pursuit.

8. PERSON

It is important for students to know that your life does not begin and end within the confines of the classroom. Both students and teachers want to show that they are more than just the sum of their activities in the classroom. While we are not condoning having encounter sessions with the students in the class, we feel that it is helpful if at times you interject personal experiences into the conversation. A student who comes to you for help with a certain problem will be greatly reassured if you admit that you also had trouble with that point the first time you came across it. A student having difficulties preparing for an exam may be interested in your own study techniques. When leading a discussion group you might want to mention a contradictory opinion held by one of your acquaintances. By revealing yourself as a person, you also allow the students to bring more of themselves into the course. In a subject such as philosophy, where personal opinions and criticisms are sought, this is especially important. As well, some areas in philosophy may be exceptionally boring (believe it or not). Showing possible connections between these areas (or some aspect of these areas) and the personal experiences of the students may not only be helpful but sometimes necessary to maintain some appreciable measure of interest.

9. ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Various parts of the discussion in this chapter have focussed on some of the ethical responsibilities of teaching assistants and lecturers in philosophy. These responsibilities could be broken down into four main groups, and could be thought of as professional guides for outlining the various ethical responsibilities of part time teaching professionals.

The teaching assistant has a responsibility to: (1) the professional standards of philosophy as a discipline, (2) the general academic standards of university teaching staff, (3) the personal standards of a serious student of philosophy, (4) the standards of the particular department to which she is attached, (5) the students under her tutelage, (6) the professional he is assisting in the department. Because of the diverse set of roles played by the teaching assistant, it is obvious that the ground is ripe for some serious value conflicts. It is not our intention to provide grounds for either assessing or even resolving these conflicts, but merely to provide a realistic picture of the range of these responsibilities.

(1) Student: When considering your responsibilities as a student, you are concerned with your responsibilities to yourself and to the Department of Philosophy. Since you have been accepted into the graduate program primarily as a student, it is important for you to ensure: (a) That you get your own work done, (b) That this work is completed within a reasonable amount of time, and (c) That you do the best job possible on your own assignments.

(2) Assistant: As an assistant to a faculty member, your responsibilities are primarily directed towards that individual. Since you are to help the instructor operate the course smoothly, your main responsibilities will be to keep open the lines of communication between the instructor and yourself and to know the technical details of the course. As an assistant, it is your responsibility to: (a) Outline with the course instructor exactly what your duties and responsibilities will be for the course; (b) Be familiar with the text book and course outline; (c) Know the technical details of the course (number and weight of assignments, etc.); and (d) Keep in contact with the instructor of the course.

(3) Teacher: As a teacher in the Department of Philosophy, your responsibilities will be to the students in the course and to the Department. Since you represent the Department in your capacity as a teacher, you should ensure that you know the material and the technical details of the course to the best of your ability. You should also show that you are concerned with helping the students reach as high a level of competence in the subject as they are able. Your basic responsibilities as a teacher are: (a) To ensure that the students know who you are; (b) To keep up with the progress of the course; (c) To know the course material; (d) To be available to the students, especially during your stated office hours; (e) To keep marks and personal information confidential; (f) To grade the students' work diligently, so that they receive their assignments back in a reasonable amount of time and with as many annotations as possible;

and (g) to acquaint yourself with knowledge of teaching methods and techniques.

(4) Professional: In your capacity as an expert, your responsibilities are very similar to those mentioned above. Your responsibility to the Department is to represent the Department as best you can by being knowledgeable in the subject matter of the course. Your responsibilities to the instructor of the course are to keep your attitude as professional as possible and respect the decisions made by the instructor. Your responsibilities to the student are again to keep yourself well informed on the progress of the course and of each student in the course. Here your responsibilities are: (a) To do sufficient background reading so that you may answer the students' questions carefully and accurately; (b) To remember your position in the Department so that you don't present yourself as THE authority; and (c) To be intellectually honest and admit it when you don't know the answer to a students' question.

(5) Advisor: Since students will come to you for advice, you should be very careful of all that you do in this role. You should be fair to each student so that a relationship of trust may develop. You must also remember your responsibilities to the instructor especially in the case where you are called upon to act as a mediator. In this capacity you should ensure that you: (a) Respect the student who comes to you for help, being especially careful not to become patronizing or manipulative; (b) Refer students with extreme personal problems to a professional counselor who has the necessary experience; (c) Take into consideration the student's individual needs when you are advising her which course might be interesting for her (taking into account her abilities, interests, etc.); and (d) Ensure that in your role as mediator, you remain neutral. Remember that you are a member of the Department, and so should respect the responsibilities that derive from this.

It is obvious that conflicts can occur between a teaching assistant's responsibilities related to (1) and (2) or (3), above. We have also outlined where conflicts could occur between (2), (3), (4) and (5). We will not pursue these concerns any further here but simply note that it may be both useful and desirable to consider yourself a professional and to consider the boundary lines outlined above as rough approximations of the extent of your personal ethical responsibilities. Knowing roughly where the boundary lines for your responsibilities are may help you to either avoid potential conflict situations, or to resolve them once you have provided some sort of priority ranking of these diverse obligations.

10. CONCLUSION

The major purpose of this chapter has been to map out some of the responsibilities that you will have as a graduate assistant. Obviously, not all of the possibilities could be covered here, but at the very least you should now be aware of the extent of your responsiblities and some of the problems and conflicts that could ensue in the pursuit of each of them.

III. OPERATING A DISCUSSION GROUP OR SEMINAR

Introduction: Discussion leaders in philosophy are often in a postion to lead individuals to a rational appraisal of their ingrained beliefs and values. This task is not easy, so we shall attempt to break it up into its functional roles.

Participant: It is crucial not to turn a discussion group into a lecture situation by setting yourself up as the authority or speaker and the rest of the group as audience. The participants in the group must feel at ease and be willing to involve themselves without intimidation.

Navigator: As an informed participant, it is also necessary for the leader to keep the group on track so that extraneous side-issues do not interfere with a clear and insightful discussion of the relevant issues.

Sink or Swim: It is important to encourage discussion and constructive criticism between group members.

Director: Offering your own questions and inputs should be attempted when it is shown that the discussion does not seem to be "on track".

Reviewer/Progress Monitor: To functions which are connected involve the leader in monitoring students progress by testing them to see if they have digested the lecture material.

Arbitrator/Marker: As leader you may be required to arbitrate disputes amongst participants in the group and required to grade individuals on their participation. In both cases you must to pay careful attention to the actual contribution or nature of the dispute.

Questioning: Finally, we offer various ways of sorting through and classifying questions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discussion groups (or seminars) are the main areas where graduate students 'get their feet wet' in the game of teaching, and so it is very important to consider at some length what is involved in leading or operating a discussion group in philosophy. The considerations which follow are not meant to be intimidating or overly didactic, but are merely offered as helpful suggestions to those facing the task of leading a discussion group for the first time.

If discussion groups are to work well, then they ought to function so as to maximize the amount and quality of discussion from all the members of the group. Some topics in philosophy are very sensitive and touch the nerves of some students creating either an unwillingness to participate in the discussion, a heated emotional response to the topic, or conflicts between students with varying personal beliefs, faiths or ingrained opinions and attitudes. These topics have to be broached carefully, honestly, and with clarity. At the same time, the biases or strongly held convictions of the discussion leader should be kept in the background.

Topics in ethics or philosophy of religion are particularly subject to these problems. Consider the question: "If God exists, why does he permit the existence of evil?" Now imagine the variety of possible answers from a group including both committed atheists and devout Christians whose faith has never been intellectually tested. Or consider the question, "Should abortion ever be permitted?" and the variety of responses you are likely to get involving personal attitudes developed over 18 or 20 years (or more). Individuals who have reached the age of consent come to philosophy with a developed 'world view' and a strong commitment to their 'common sense' base, which sometimes gets shaken when they are asked to consider fundamental value questions or questions involving the very nature of the world. These views or ingrained opinions (one hopes) can and sometimes do get altered, generally as a result of exposure to a good university education and especially with exposure to probing and insightful philosophical discussion. But for some students, this transition is not easy. Our beliefs carry not only rational but also emotional commitment, and very often the latter makes it difficult and even painful to consider clearly and dispassionately the rational basis for our beliefs, especially if these are at the very foundation of our 'world view.'

It is one of the prime tasks of the discussion leader in philosophy to lead students to the point where they can rationally consider alternative world views, hypotheses, or arguments, without at the same time requiring that they 'automatically' give up all that has gone before. We know there is an opinion that students should be 'violently shaken' from their ingrained and so-called defective world views, but such an approach probably turns more people away from philosophy than toward it. The 'lead' rather than 'shake' approach is not easy to carry off and we have no established or 'pat' solutions to offer, but merely some guides that we hope will make the task a little easier. It is often useful to go over a class plan with the professor beforehand. Which kinds of questions should be asked, what sorts of points to be emphasized and whether to review material or focus on new applications of arguments given in the course are all related to the instructor's own conception of the course work and the course design.

2. FUNCTIONS OF A DISCUSSION LEADER

a) Participant: When operating a discussion group it is best to talk with the participants (students) not to or at them. An obvious point but needing reiteration. If, for example, a discussion leader moves from participating in the discussion to actually running the discussion, then the discussion group is transformed into an audience. Two way communication becomes one way communication with students dutifully copying down every last syllable for later regurgitation. However, this negates the intention of a discussion group, which is to encourage the largest amount of quality discussion from the greatest number of students. The overall strategy, of course, is to encourage discussion and debate among the students both within the seminar and outside it. A course which is carried on beyond the narrow confines of the classroom is obviously of more lasting value to students than one which fixes itself to a prescribed time slot and geographic location.

Sometimes as discussion leaders we like to set the parameters for the ensuing debate by clarifying concepts and setting out classifications which we know to be accurate. This is a useful strategy as long as it does not have the effect of inhibiting discussion to the point where students feel they can not contribute since they fear framing their questions or responses in the wrong language or terms (it also fails if the students come to the group expecting an introductory lecture-the students uncertainties should be cleared up before any of this clarification begins). All the direction for the group need not come from the leader even though some direction should come from her. The leader should provide some minimal direction and act as a resource in order to 'clarify' or 'hone' the direction established by the student members of the group. Fine tuning needs to take place only when the group's direction gets far removed from issues involved in the course into irrelevant areas which bear little or no relation to the content and direction of the course proper. This can be accomplished partly on the basis of the kind and direction of questions the leader puts to the group. Questioning will be discussed later on in this section.

A discussion group works well only if all the participants feel at ease in the situation, so that they feel free to make contributions of their own. Anything which detracts from this is to be avoided. This is especially true when the subject area is philosophy, where the topics, as we mentioned earlier, may either touch very close to home, or involve some degree of abstraction not encountered previously by the student. In both cases, students may feel intimidated by the subjects under discussion. Setting an easy workable 'tone' or atmosphere for the discussion group at the outset is both a useful and necessary function of the leader. Sometimes this can best be accomplished by the way the leader participates in the group, rather than the actual design of the group or the design of the seminar format.

Large discussion groups of 45 or more members present some special problems. Generally, the larger the group the smaller the number of contributors and the larger the number of those who comfortably are able to consider themselves part of the 'audience.' This large a group may need to be divided up into smaller groups with each sub group debating some issues among themselves before a representative of each of the groups begins a debate with a representative of one of the other groups. In a large class in informal logic, for example, it may be useful to divide the class into small sub groups to devise arguments in favour of or in opposition to an expressed issue or view. Then, each week a different representative of the group may be designated to present the group's argument and (along with other members of the group) defend it as best she can against any counter arguments offered by members of the other groups. This process of breaking larger groups up into smaller groups can continue as long as low participation continues until finally you end up with groups of 4 or 5 members each. The process can be gradually reversed - creating larger out of smaller groups - if participation increases dramatically.

b) Navigator: As discussion leader it is your task to keep the discussion on topic and to ensure that the points raised are relevant to the topic or topics under consideration. It is always easy to go off on tangents and irrelevant anecdotes, especially since it is often useful to relate aspects of the topic or the discussion of it to the student's life experiences. But a firm hold must be kept on the topic, so that people are not bored by incessant recountings of personal anecdotes, stream of consciousess recountings, or idiosyncratic dream experiences. At the same time, the participants in the seminar should be made aware of the leader's strategy, so that they do not feel that they are being 'cut off' arbitrarily by the leader for no other reason than that he does not approve of their ideas or thoughts. The function of 'guide' or 'navigator' is not simple. It is easy to trample on egos or thwart the participation of someone by cutting him off just when he was about to make his point. There are no hard and fast rules here, but at the very least, everyone who has a point to make should be accorded the opportunity to make it, even though some take longer than others. Sometimes a group can be brought back on course by a question such as:

"Bearing in mind what Sheila has just said (about X), can we now add to what we have said so far in response to the original question?" It is also useful to have one student comment on another's point or position, designating a student commentator.

c) Sink or Swim: It is part of the discussion leader's task to encourage students in the group to try out their ideas, objections, and arguments on the rest of the group. In this laboratory-like situation there is limited cost and much to be gained to the student floating such trial balloons. Obviously, this does not just happen by itself. Some effort must be made to create it. Everyone should be encouraged to contribute something to the group, even if their contribution is nothing more than an expression of approval for someone else's view. One can simply go round the table and have everyone say something. Everything should be done to break down the feeling of intimidation or the fear of ridicule that some people face as they hold back expressing their views. A laboratory is a testing ground for any and every view, and in this case it is best to have the maximum number of views expressed. Fear of having your views tested at all has to be overcome. It needs to be stressed that the student can gain the following in such a laboratory of ideas:

(1) Insights from fellow students or the discussion leader concerning resource material (books, articles, etc.) to substantiate her views.

When we verbalize our views in front of an audience, no detachment from them is possible. The discussion group members need to think of themselves as all in the same boat, so that the division between 'speaker/performer' on one hand and detached 'audience' on the other is minimized. It needs to be stressed that helping a fellow student 'clarify' or even 'defend' her view or interpretation (by providing additional evidence for her arguments, for example) is as valuable a contribution as showing the faults or drawbacks of her view.

(2) Insights from fellow students or the discussion leader as to possible objections to her views or to her arguments (see 1 above).
This information is extremely valuable to the student as it can aid in the re-formulation of the argument or the introduction of counter examples to deal with objections.

(3) In verbalizing her arguments or views before putting them to paper the student gains insight as to how best to describe or compose her arguments, ideas or responses. Greater precision of expression sometimes occurs when we are pressed to verbalize our views prior to writing them down (when it is sometimes difficult to visualize our audience and gauge their reactions). The end result should be to create more forceful and convincing student responses or arguments in a non-intimidating situation.

d) Director: The discussion leader should, initially, encourage other students in the group to attempt to answer a particular student's question. It helps if you can, as quickly as possible, get to know the students' names. Sometimes simply looking at the student and introducing what she said during the last meeting (and, of course, showing what relevance it bears on the current debate) helps to keep individuals interested and conscious that you remember their contributions. One way to match names to faces is to make the match when you hand back completed assignments. Another is to simply sit in different locations in the lectures in order to pick out different faces and fix them to names.

If the attempts to get students to respond to the questions of other students produces no results (especially likely in the initial stages of a discussion group), then you could offer as many possible answers as you can muster and suggest where (library, journals, books) the student can attain more comprehensive answers.

At the same time, the leader has to offer some direction and not be thought of as simply another participant. Offering the right questions can set a good direction for the responses of the group members while retreating to a lecture format puts the onus or responsibility for the direction and content of the discussion group solely on the shoulders of the discussion leader. He now becomes another lecturer in the course. But, the responsibility for much of the direction and even content of the discussion group should be vested in the members of the group. This is at least the ideal. After you get to know some of the students and their positions on various issues, then more of the orchestration of the contributions can take place as you point out that Jones' views are in opposition to those of Smith on the moral status of a person, given Jones' previously expressed views on abortion.

e) Reviewer: It is sometimes necessary and useful for the discussion leader to review salient points from the lecture which preceded the discussion, involving the students (with directed questions) as much as possible in the process. In this way, everyone in the group is aware of some initial direction to the discussion and familiar with what is to be discussed. One hopes that their memories will be jogged as to where they had problems with the lecture.

Another aspect of this 'reviewer function' involves the leader's ability to keep a running tab on where the groups have been and what has been discussed as a kind of chronicler of events and progress. It is interesting both from the instructor's and the students' points of view to know what progress/developments have occurred in the course of the discussion groups - a crude map of the territory covered is sometimes helpful.

It isn't always obvious, with contributions made by various people, what has taken place in the discussion group and the lecture. As these considerations are used in the framing of the final exam, they should also be made clear to the students in the course. Reviews help us to keep on track, so we know where we have been and what yet remains to be accomplished given the course outline or overall direction.

f) Progress Monitor: At various points in the discussion groups (sometimes these occur more frequently prior to final examinations or mid-term examinations) it may be necessary to inform the students 'where they are in the course'; that is, what they should know at this stage in the course, what skills they should have developed, what is expected from them until the end of the course. They may need reminding as to what they should know or be able to do to successfully complete the mid-term or the final examination. This may be done in the lectures, but if not, then it may be necessary for the discussion leader to bring this information to the students. It may also be useful for the discussion leader to question the students themselves to see what progress they are in fact making or what difficulties they may be having with the lecture or text material, assignments, etc.

Sometimes surprise or even scheduled tests or quizzes are used to fulfill the function of monitoring progress. If these are written tests then they would seem to be somewhat at odds with the aim of getting people on their feet in the discussion group to verbalize their views. The discussion leader could simply begin the meeting with a set of questions designed to test members of the group to determine whether or not they are familiar with material they should know by this stage in the course. There are times when such things as 'surprise quizzes' do in fact have a desirable effect. For example, when they help students to realize what they do not as yet know or when they serve to focus attention in the discussion groups on important parts of the course. These tests will work successfully in a discussion group only if they are thought of as "learning tools" rather than as another type of "evaluation".

g) Arbitrator: See Chapter 'Roles.' It may be necessary to arbitrate a dispute between participants in a discussion group, especially since some individuals wear their views or opinions on certain personal matters 'on their sleeves.' This is no easy task. It needs to be stressed in these groups, however, that whether or not a view or argument is convincing requires minimally that someone other than the arguer be: (1) capable of understanding and possibly empathizing with the expressed view and (2) capable of agreeing or disagreeing with the expressed view.

This excludes (of course) certain appeals to idiosyncratic knowledge claims, mystical experiences, dream experiences, appeals to faith or to 'special access' knowledge, truth, wisdom, or insight. Obviously, if such 'special access' does hold, no one other than the holder could know, let alone debate it. The privacy of your own mind is the best (possible?) place (?) to air such a view. The discussion group is obviously not the place to bring up such appeals.

The leader needs to maintain the free flow of ideas while at the same time setting the stage so that certain obviously irrelevant considerations are shelved. After all, seminars are best used as vehicles not for venting spleen, but rather for airing ideas that could ultimately appear in more polished form on assignments. A discussion group is not a separate and detached part of the course but rather an integral part of it. It is not a situation where people are allowed complete free reign to express whatever they want - a kind of soap box platform for whatever stream of consciousness experience one wants to show an audience (any audience?) with a kind of therapeutic catharsis. The audience in the case of this discussion group is specialized. They are all considering the same set of problems even though they are considering them from (hopefully) different perspectives. The interest level of the group has to be maintained with the constraints of some intellectual vigour and without resorting to simple theatrical devices. There needs to be a clear distancing from mere 'bull sessions' and this requires arbitration between fruitful discussion and non-fruitful monologues.

h) Marking/Grading: See Chapter 'Marking.' It may be required that the discussion leader evaluate the individual performance of students in the discussion group for part of the final course grade. Keeping a written, running tally of who said anything in the group on a day to day basis can be intimidating for some and a signal for others to produce the maximum amount of 'white noise.'

White noise in this case is the sound produced by those individuals in a seminar group who decide that they must 'say something.' In most cases this means anything that gets them the floor or an audience. Their contributions do not generally relate or add to the ongoing debate on the floor in anything but a superficial way. The idea seems to be that if you say enough (lots) in a seminar situation then you will be remembered for having contributed to it. But, white noise is a time waster and generally does not contribute to the direction the discussion is taking. The floor is monopolized with useless comments or totally extraneous remarks.

Those who receive high grades for seminar participation should also be those who have kept track of what is going on in the debates - those who are paying attention and can show that they paid attention. Sometimes particular individuals ask a lot of questions, but they are the kind of questions which show that these people are not keeping up with the debates. Grading seminar or discussion members' contributions is always difficult and sometimes it may be necessary to give every member of the group the same grade if the group excelled and no one member distinguished herself beyond the efforts of the others. This has the effect of cutting down on the kind of competition for grades that generally tends to produce 'white noisers' in these situations.

White noisers (unfortunately) sometimes seem to succeed because, if we are not careful, we remember the quantity but not the quality or even relevance of what a particular individual said over a period of time. When at the end of the term we are required to tally up the contributions we tend to remember that the vociferous had lots to say. It does not follow, however, that what these individuals had to say offered an insightful contribution of any value to the group or the discussion. Other individuals who said very little over the course of the term, on the other hand, may have added valuable insights and well thought out responses in less quantity than the 'white noise' specialist. Now this relation does not always hold, obviously, as some individuals may 'white noise' us at various times while providing valuable insights at others. The distribution of contributions to the discussions should ideally be kept as equal as possible among the participants with the leader keeping some restrained control over the vociferous 'white noisers' who sometimes use up valuable discussion time and dissuade others from participating or even attending seminars which have turned into vehicles for the expression of the views of one or two people. One should obviously try to avoid this situation but not at the expense of cutting off all discussion or bruising fragile egos. Obviously, what has to happen is a change in direction for the group if this kind of problem predominates. The group's attention needs to be focussed away from one or two individuals to other members and the ways of doing this vary. One could, arbitrarily, pick on different members of the group who have not been contributing and ask them questions directly to get them immediately into the debate. One could as other non-contributing members to address responses to the vociferous "white noisers".

i) Questioning: As mentioned earlier, one of the important functions of discussion group leaders involves asking questions in such a way that they keep the group on track and plugged into the direction and content of the course proper. If we have successfully negated the students' fear of criticism and wish to encourage an active group of participants then it becomes necessary to ensure that the questions we frame to the group are not:

(1) Intimidating, so as to sound as if they require the kind of answer the student is incapable of providing given her limited knowledge of technical terms or classification schemes, etc. For example: 'Does the initial metaphysical plausibility of Aristotle's normative teleological ethical theory arise from viewing it as a quasi-psychological doctrine of the motivation of homo sapiens?'

(2) Ambiguous, to the extent that the student hesitates to provide an answer to a question or response to a problem when it is not clear what territory the question is supposed to map. For example, we might ask (if we were perverse): 'Why did St. Thomas Aquinas write "The Five Ways"?'

(3) Seeking information only, rather than a critical response. In philosophy it is always necessary to ensure that the question you ask demands a critical/evaluative response and not just a response which offers 'Yes/No' answers or answers which provide simply a description of the situation only. Dare we ask: 'Who was the founding father of utilitarianism?'

(4) The kinds of questions which look as if they demand more than one answer at once. It is better to frame questions in such a way that one answer is required, even though this answer itself could lead to some other related questions. We might ask: 'How do Descartes' metaphysical views, his ideas about rationality and his methods differ from those of Berkeley and Hume?'

(5) The kinds of questions which are too broad and cover too much intellectual territory: 'What did Kant and J.P. Sartre think about life in general or the meaning of life?'

(6) The kinds of questions which are overly suggestive (too obvious) in the answers you are seeking. Give away questions are both boring and generally unproductive of intellectual development. For example, we might ask: 'Of course, Descartes did not succeed to prove what he set out to prove, did he?'

(7) The kinds of questions which are themselves or show themselves to be representing some approval or disapproval on the part of the leader. For example: 'Obviously, Sartre was an idiot (idealist?) or he wouldn't have said what he

said at x.' 'Anyone, like Sartre, who says x is surely not very bright or intellectually honest', etc.

(8) Rhetorical questions for which the answer is not obvious to the other members of the group and for which no answer is actually being sought. It becomes somewhat disconcerting for those who do attempt an answer to these questions. For example, someone might say: "Sartre was obviously wrong about freedom, wasn't he?" and not suppose there to be any need for a response from the group since the answer is taken to be obvious from the way the question is put.

Now obviously there needs to be some leeway here as questions which show some feigned approval of the leader or are suggestive can be effectively used to move a lethargic group to respond, when they would not have done so otherwise. Saying something outrageous, or making a position appear more silly than it is, or setting yourself up as the 'stooge' for some ridiculous position or other can serve to highlight problem areas and spur on active and lively debate within limits. The negative drawback here is that you may characterize a position as ludicrous or silly that is actually held by one of the participants. If he takes you literally, then he may feel that there is no point in responding to your question or engaging in the debate. After all, the discussion leader has already said or intimated that my position is ridiculous, so why subject myself to ridicule or even follow through on some attempted defence of a position which she could easily show to be a foolish one? The group may also miss your 'too, too subtle' sarcastic or ironic tone and take you to be endorsing a view you are in fact attempting to parody, ridicule, or mock.

There is a useful classification system of questions outlined in the table contained in Appendix I.[2] This classification scheme may have some drawbacks, but it is still useful to see how different kinds of questions can elicit different kinds of answers and it may even be useful to tell the students which sort of question you are asking in order to avoid any possible ambiguities.

A variety of different questions could be asked of the participants on one particular topic. It may also be useful to classify the response of certain students to the question asked: causal, teleological, etc. It goes without saying that those who respond well to a particular question should be praised for doing so and that some effort should be made to sort out a problematic response in order to make it work as best it can - rather than simply dismissing it as ill expressed and therefore of no value. For example, if someone has missed an important distinction in his description of Descartes' position, then clarifying this distinction is the first task. In some cases, repairing a possibly ambiguous or vague expression of a position should take place before it is rejected outright as ill-formed or ill-thought out. In other cases, we might suggest ways in which a critical response or question could be reformulated to give it more "bite" or force.

Sometimes silence works to create responses. That is, often discussion leaders wait only a short time for a response to a question and if none is forthcoming then they go on to answer it themselves or go on to the next question. However, a period of silence sometimes puts pressure on the group to respond. If, for example, the group knows that you will always answer a question for them then they may tend to wait for your response and not bother to think about an answer of their own. Do not be overly concerned or afraid of a moderate (but not prolonged) period of silence--exactly how long must be left to your discretion.

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[2] (From: Idea Paper No.8, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development Kansas State University, August 1982.)

Orchestrate the group in such a way that you show how one student's response relates to that of another student or how it relates to other topics or material in the course. Show how one response develops from another, thus showing how individual members of the group are contributing individually to the collective knowledge of the group and at the same time how each contribution is intrinsically valuable.

Try to avoid overly qualifying a response to a question. 'Surely, you didn't mean to suggest that all existentialists were impotent, did you?' Or, 'That's an interesting response, but...' Let the other participants discuss possible qualifications when they become aware of the consequences of particular statements, views, or arguments. In some cases the student himself will realize how his view or argument needs to be qualified as the discussion proceeds. At the end of each discussion group meeting it may be useful to have the participants summarize what has been accomplished in the meeting, as a kind of review and clarification.

As a way of dealing with questions of value the following table may prove helpful:

Resolving Value Conflicts

The questioner poses the following

1. What is the value conflict about?

2. What are the key words used in talking about this conflict?

3. Define the key terms

4. What are the possible actions open to person X that will resolve the conflict? (What can person X do?)

5. What are the likely consequences if person X took the first (second, third, etc.) alternative

6. What are the chances that these will occur?

7. Which consequences are good (desirable, preferred, advantageous) and which are not good?

8. What is or would be a similar, related conflict and its resolution?

9. Is there a general principle which indicates which value has priority over the other? If so, what is it?

10. At this point, what do you think person X should do to resolve the conflict?

11. What are the reasons for resolving the conflict this way?

The respondent will hopefully provide the following sorts of answers

1. Identifies and describes the conflict
2. Identifies central concepts.
3. Defines essential terms for clarity of communication
4. Describes alternatives available.
5. Predicts consequences of the various alternatives
6. Estimates the likelihood of the consequences happening
7. Evaluates the consequences.
8. Describes a parallel situation.
9. Seeks overall ranking of values which will subsume this particular instance of conflict.
10. Expresses resolution based on previous points.
11. Gives reasons, justifies the suggested resolution to the value conflict[3]

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[3] (Idea Paper No 8, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development, Kansas State University, August 1982.)

Obviously, one does not necessarily have to follow the sequence suggested in this table. It is offered only as one suggested way of creating a sequence of developed questions designed to achieve a particular aim. The movement here is from the particular exampl[illegible] situation to more advanced abstractions and developed evaluations. It moves from initial description to final evaluation of these kinds of conflict situations. Try dealing with the general concerns of: abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, or any other contentious value conflict to determine how well this suggested sequence works.

3. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS:

The preceding has been an attempt to sort out and make clear some of the functions of a discussion leader in a seminar in philosophy. We have attempted to forge a link between the different functions of such a leader as she moves from participant to director to arbitrator, while at the same time maintaining a clear separation between what should happen in a discussion group and what does happen in a lecture situation. In the end, however both situations share the same aims of:

(1) creating a situation in which the student can use and test his ideas, knowledge, and understanding of concepts in the course,

(2) creating a situation in which the student can compare his understanding and his ideas to those of his peers,

(3) promoting reasoned critical evaluation of fundamental concepts or ideas, such that the students develop an attitude of critical appraisal.

The discussion situation is an important part of any philosophy course especially since we normally do not expect students to just retain a body of factual knowledge but rather develop a reasoned critical approach which they can apply to the views, arguments and theories of others. This aim requires a situation in which people can feel comfortable testing their ideas, reactions, appraisals and objections, free from intimidation. To create and maintain such a situation is no easy task but one essential to the discipline of philosophy. All of the outlined functions should be thought of as suggestions to deal with situations which could arise in a discussion group. Some discussion groups work well with little or no problems, so no attempt needs to be made to make the operation of these groups more demanding or onerous than necessary.

IV. LECTURING

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a cure-all for poor lecturing nor to argue for or against lecturing as a teaching method, but rather to present some suggestions aimed toward improving your lecturing technique.

Design: It is better to prepare too much material than too little and to design the course so that the material increases in difficulty as the term progresses. You might wish to try different approaches to lecturing such as setting up dialogues, discussions, and debates.

Preparation: Plan your lecture to fit into the scheduled time period and allow for the general rule that few points can be covered effectively in a single lecture. As most students' attention spans wane after about twenty minutes, you might want to plan a question period for that time.

Communicating the material: Don't talk constantly, speak too quietly, or too quickly. Address the audience. If you feel you are losing your audience you might try to change your delivery. Remember that good lecturing is learned through practice.

Timing: It helps to start each class by outlining the points you wish to cover that day and using this list as a reminder and check-list.

Performance: Don't think of a lecture as merely a way of disseminating pure information: personal anecdotes, stories, and asides can provide welcome diversion if they are well thought out Look at your audience; neither the floor nor the blackboard are concerned with what you have to say.

1. LECTURING IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

From: Chartularium universitatis Parisiensis, III, Dec.10,1355

In the name of the Lord, amen. Two methods of lecturing on books in the liberal arts having been tried, the former masters of philosophy uttering their words rapidly so that the mind of the hearer can take them in but the hand cannot keep up with them, the latter speaking slowly until their listeners can catch up with them with the pen; having compared these by diligent examination, the former method is found the better. Wheretofore, the consensus of opinion warns us that we imitate it in our lectures. We, therefore, all and each, masters of the faculty of arts, teaching and not teaching, convoked for this specially by the venerable man, master Albert of Bohemia, then rector of the university, at St.Julien le Pauvre, have decreed in this wise, that all lecturers, whether masters or scholars of the same faculty, whenever and wherever they chance to lecture on any text ordinarily or cursorily in the same faculty, or to dispute any question concerning it, or anything else by way of exposition, shall observe the former method of lecturing to the best of their ability, so speaking forsooth as if no one was taking notes before them, in the way that sermons and recommendations are made in the university and which the lectures in other faculties follow. Moreover, transgressors of this statute, if the lecturers are masters or scholars, we now deprive henceforth for a year from lecturing, honors, offices and other advantages of our faculty. Which if anyone violates, for the first relapse we double the penalty, for the second we

quadruple it, and so on. Moreover, listeners who oppose the execution of this statute by clamor, hissing, noise, throwing stones by themselves or by their servants and accomplices, or in any other way, we deprive of and cut off from our society for a year, and for each relapse we increase the penalty double and quadruple as above.
(From: PAST AND PRESENT, April, 1984, p.11)

2. INTRODUCTION

This excerpt taken from the early (Middle Ages) statutes of the University of Paris (1355) illustrates some problems with lecturing which may still exist today. We cannot hope to provide the cure-all for poor lecturing, but we can provide some practical suggestions that we have found useful. We also will not deal with the question of whether or not lecturing is a good means of transmitting information or conducting a class. In some instances and for some material it obviously is not the best vehicle. What all we hope to do is to make the operation as smooth as possible (not to push a metaphor too far).

In the Department of Philosophy, TA's are sometimes required to lecture when an instructor cannot attend a particular class and sometimes find themselves as instructors of a section of a class. Many doctoral candidates will find themselves as course instructors at some point in their stay here, so it is important to at least cusorily examine some points about lecturing.

Here are some suggestions for dealing with a lecture situation, setting up and giving a lecture. In many cases lectures will be combined with discussion meetings (2 lectures, 1 discussion per week, etc.), or some lectures may run more like discussion groups than old style stand up lectures. (Refer to the section on discussion groups in this book for more information on the design and operation of this method.) If you are required to lecture, remember that this does not, of course, preclude your encouraging the maximum amount of discussion among the participants.

a) Design: This involves designing a set of lectures to fit a particular idea of what a course in X should involve. Here, you should not include too much or too little; it is better to err on the former rather than the latter side, as it is easier to save material for another class than it is to face a class when you have nothing left to say.

You should design the development of the content of the course from less difficult material to more difficult, and design the testing tasks in the course to meet this challenge. The tests should be meaningful and relevant to the material that you stress is important in the course. Make sure everyone knows what the overall task or skill is you are asking them to develop in order to master the course. The course should be constructed to be a challenge, not a bore.

Encourage those who are interested in doing more in the course to do so. Encourage 'work output/effort' and 'achievement' and reward both. Look at the individual to see what she has accomplished in the course. It is a good idea to discount grades achieved on the first or second assignment in relation to subsequent assignments to encourage the student not to fear some initial failure.

Modulate how you approach different topics so that your approach varies somewhat from topic to topic - experiment (have fun) with different approaches (eg., dialogues, debates, open discussions). Treat lecturing as a learning project.

Do not talk all the time; take breaks, ask questions, elicit responses if only to monitor how well what you have been coveying has been received. You might ask, for example, "Has everyone understood the material so far?" When you are unsure of what to say next, pause a moment to collect your thoughts. You will not lose your audience's attention by doing so and it is far better to do this than it is to ramble on with only a vague idea of what you want to say and how you want to have it come across. Review, review, review, and encourage the students to do this on their own. Leave time in your schedules for review.

b) Preparation: This involves doing the necessary research and sketching out how it will fit into the allotted time periods (including comments and questioning time from the students). If you do not prepare enough material for the time period, then you will run out of steam before the final bell. If you prepare too much, then you are better off provided you do not try to jam too much into too little time. Timing is a learned ability here. The variables are: the difficulty of the material being conveyed (as perceived primarily by the students) and, following this, the amount of time taken up with students' questions and comments or problems.

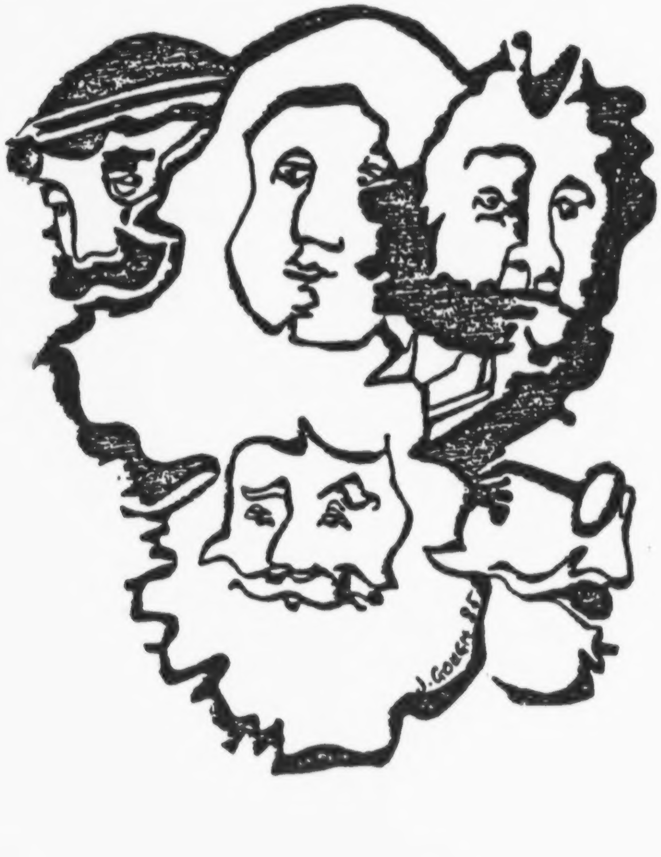
As a general rule, it is best to realize that only a few points can be communicated effectively in a single lecture, fewer points, in fact, than most novices realize. This is an important consideration when planning the lecture material. Also, one must be aware that the average attention span of the students in a class diminishes after about twenty minutes, so it is best to take a break to ask questions at this point.

c) Communicating or conveying the material: Do not come on like God, but rather as a knowledgeable instructor. Arrogance (on the part of the lecturer) produces contempt (on the part of the students). Address the audience: try not to talk down or up to them (gauge this as you go along by the questions they ask you about the material). Look at the audience or at least selected members of the audience. Try to get over the feeling (which may be justified) that they are inwardly judging you on your attire or sex-appeal or delivery or degree of competence or general abilities each and every minute of each and every lecture. Change your delivery if people suddenly start falling asleep or leaving in droves. Get as much feedback - as you go along - from the students about how well they are receiving the material and how interesting the topics are in relation to their interests. Remember to keep your voice audible enough that those in the very back can hear what you are saying clearly. Modulate your voice so that you do not come out droning in some monotone. Use you voice level to emphasize points. Stress what is important when you encounter it, not sometime later.

It is one thing to be aware of the above points, and quite another to effectively implement them. Good lecturing is learned by practice. Often teachers are quite unaware of how they appear in front of a class. The Teaching Resource Office will arrange to have someone attend one of your lectures (and will even video-tape the event) to provide you with helpful suggestions to improve your teaching style. If the thought of a stranger attending your lectures is too intimidating, then enlist the aid of a friend.

d) Timing: Say less and have it comprehended, rather than more and have only parts of it comprehended or all of it only poorly comprehended. Developing a sense of timing, so that the material is best absorbed, involves practice. Here 'timing' is directly connected with the planning of the course material, rather than the quick come-back that is typified by the timing of a comedian. Do not try to stick to some rigid design constituting a set amount of material. If you have any flexibility, then try to match the output of material you convey to the ability of each particular class to respond to and absorb it. Be aware that responses from the students could (hopefully) alter your schedule somewhat. One way to ensure that you cover all the material you want to cover in the available is to start each lecture by putting the points you hope to consider in the lecture in point form on the board. Look at these points as you proceed to ensure that you filling them all in as you go along--use these points as a reminder and check-list. The use of this check-list has the added bonus of keeping both you and students on track so that deviations from the intended lecture are kept to a minimum and all the material is covered. The check-list is a useful organizational device for those of us who have trouble sticking to an organized procedure as we proceed through the points we wish to convey.

e) Performance: You are not required to be able to deliver a lecture like Johnny Carson delivers a (well prepared and well written) monologue. But do not think of a lecture as just a way of disseminating pure information. Personal anecdotes, short stories and asides are sometimes welcome diversions. And there is nothing wrong with some strategically introduced diversions. They tend to slow down the pace or at least change the pace of the lecture. This allows some breathing space for both you and the students, for it allows them some time to think about what you have just said and perhaps formulate questions about it. Do not try to be too 'cute' in your remarks or too obtuse either. A pause is useful but a complete lecture which turns into a diversion away from the main topic of the course is not useful. Most students are not stupid and can easily see through a padded or poorly prepared lecture. People in the communications business know that if you 'turn off' your audience once, it will be difficult to retrieve them and even if you do retrieve them it will be difficult to return to an attention level you might have achieved from a previous lecture or set of lectures. They easily lose confidence in you, and what you say is tinged by the trivialities you spouted the last time. Look at your audience not the blackboard or the floor. Neither the blackboard nor the floor are concerned with what you have to say. Or, if they are, then you are in trouble. Seek professional help immediately. Seek out and use examples from the students' personal experiences and try to integrate them into the lectures. Sometimes this is difficult, depending on the nature of the material you are teaching. Introduce as many interesting, pertinent questions or illustrations or examples of your own to add dimension and scope to the lectures - taking them from the abstract to the real and back again. The best questions in some situations are those that invite a multitude of possible responses. The more students who get involved in attempting to answer the question, the better. If the initial response does not constitute the precise answer required then suggest ways that the respondent could alter her answer to make it more precise or clear. Teach - do not (even if you think of yourself as the fundamentalist evangelist of philosophy - the Socrates of the Sunday morning Sermon-sell) preach! Listen to yourself. Play tapes of your lectures back and listen for the sound and resonance of your voice and the way you convey information and encourage a response. Try not to convey the impression that you are talking from on high.



V. MARKING

General Concerns: Evaluating the work of others is not an easy task. We want to be fair and try to provide the type of evaluation that we would hope to receive ourselves. Try to take the most reasonable interpretation of a student's work.

Setting Fair Examinations: (1) Keep to the material covered in the course. (2) Set standards relative to your students. (3) Set tests so that they challenge students and not so that they just test their ability to retain facts. (4) Try to allow some options. Make it clear how many questions are to be answered. Make sure that the students are aware in advance of what the test will cover, and also of the type of questions involved (essay questions, short answer, etc.).

Evaluating the Performance of Students: Consider whether (1) you have a set standard of performance in mind and (2) you have a set pattern for the distribution of marks. Don't set absolute and external standards of which the students are unaware or cannot meet.

Dealing With Dissent: If you have thought about your grading standards and final distribution, it will be less difficult to justify the grades you give. While there is no easy way to deal with protests about marks, you can (1) be consistent in your response to all protests, (2) do not be afraid to admit that you have made a mistake in evaluating a student's performance, (3) be calm and stay firm about your response, (4) when confronted with differences of interpretation, let the student defend her view and evaluate this defense., and (5) is all else fails, resolve the dispute by appealing to the person operating the course.

1. GENERAL CONCERNS ABOUT EVALUATION

The purpose of marking is to provide the following information: (1) a judgement based on the marker's expertise about a student's ability to perform the task assigned, (2) an indication of the student's individual progress in the course, (3) some encouragement for work that is well done, (4) some indication of what the student needs to do to improve his work in the future, (5) some insights as to what aspects of the problem/area the student has overlooked in her evaluation or research. For most of us, it is not easy to evaluate the work of others. We want to be both fair and just in our evaluations. We need to think about reciprocity (turning the tables) and provide the kind of evaluation we would hope to receive ourselves. We also need to exercise of the principle of charity, and not take the worst possible interpretation of the work of others, but the best or most reasonable interpretation. It is useful to consider the particular situation of the student you are evaluating in the course. Is she a part-time student? Is she an older student who has just come back to school? Is he a major in the subject you are teaching or is this simply an optional course? Is the student majoring in some other discipline 'required' to take this course for the completion of his/her degree? Is it possible to measure and grade individual ability against some universal or general standards you or anyone in a similar course would require?

2. SETTING FAIR EXAMINATIONS

It may be necessary for a TA to either set a final examination or aid the instructor in setting a final examination for a course. If you are in such a position, we provide some guidelines for setting final examinations in what follows. There are a wide variety of tasks that could be involved in setting quizzes or tests. These tests could be more specific-testing task retention, information retrieval/use and so on. We are assuming that what holds true for what we say about final examinations, should equally hold true for mid-term tests, or quizzes. (1) Do not set examinations which require the student to know material that you have not covered in the course or assigned as outside reading for the course.

(2) Set examinations relative to the standards in the class. In other words, do not set an examination that no one in 'this' class could pass even though someone in another class of more advanced students could pass. Sometimes people set examinations to show how difficult their course is, how tough the standards for their course are. Why should this be the goal? The goal for an examination should be to test the real abilities or knowledge of people now taking the course, not the imagined ability of ideal participants.

(3) Set challenging examinations which measure not the mere retention of knowledge, but rather the ability to use knowledge or ability acquired in the course.

(4) Set examinations with some options and with clear indications of what is required for each question, including the relative amount of time the student should spend on each question.

Students should know in advance (very early on in the course) what will be required of them on the final examination: what sort of skills, what sort of questions, etc. To be fair, any mid-term or quiz should be set up to measure what students are capable of producing. Tests should ideally be close to the lectures in which the material is discussed. The more remote they are from this material, the more likely it is that important material will not be retained. If the course is designed to hone skills, then frequent tests of these skills will be necessary with a variety of relevant examples or exercises. We should remember that skills are retained longer after an individual's university experience than is passively acquired knowledge. The long term effect of a skill or task oriented course is greater than the long term effects of a knowledge or fact oriented course.

Keeping this in mind mind we should think about designing examinations and tests that measure individual skills rather than simply the retention of information. We might expect, for example, that students in a philosophy course could develop the relevant skill of assessing the arguments of others to determine the cogency of their positions. We might further expect that philosophy students could develop their own coherent and consistent position on some topic of interest in the course, taking account of counter considerations or counter arguments in the process. What we need, then, are examinations that are accurate and reliable tests for the performance of the above skills.

3. EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

When grading examinations, we should consider two important questions: (1) Do we have a set standard of performance for the tasks of this course or any similar course in philosophy? and (2) Do we have a set or standard pattern for the distributions of grades/marks in this course? With reference to (1) we need to be clear about the relationship between ideal standards of performance and the actual standards of performance of students in this class or this section of the class. The standards should be flexible enough that they are not impossible for an intelligent student to do reasonably well in the course, provided he does the work for the course. It is unfair to set external and absolute standards which (a) the students may not be aware of and (b) may not be capable of meeting in this class. What would such standards serve to prove? Would they show that philosophy courses like this one were tough and demanding? Or would they show that the standards for this course were out of touch with reality? With reference to (2) it seems better to let the distribution of grades match the actual performance of the students in the course rather than some ideal and external standard of distribution. Should the number of 'B' and 'A' grades be greater than the total number of 'C' and 'D' grades in this course? If so, why? We need to look at the total picture.

If the course has several sections, then it is likely that the overall distribution for all sections will average out to some reasonable distribution. Artificially altering the distribution will do nothing but show that the actual performance of the students in the course is irrelevant to the final distribution. Why strive for your 'B' when you know that the final alterations in the distribution could turn this into a 'C' or, at the other end, a low 'A'? Most students are unlikely to complain - you reason - if all the grades are averaged upwards? But, what about those students who prior to redistribution had achieved an 'A' through considerable hard work, and now see this 'A' devalued as many of those in the 'B' range move upwards. Any grade in the 'A' range suggests that the student has performed well beyond the average in the class and would do equally well in similar philosophy courses anywhere. A 'C' grade still denotes average performance, while a 'B' continues to be thought of as slightly above average, but not demonstrably superior work (we are, of course, generalizing about how grades are in fact interpreted without having done an any survey to determine whether or not others would agree with this generalization). Students come into a course with the expectation that these standards apply, so it seems unfair to alter them merely to satisfy your need for a grade distribution which will supposedly reflect well on your teaching ability. They all did well because I was a superior teacher, or they all did relatively poorly because I was a demanding teacher with high standards, are equally difficult to prove.

What are these standards being compared to? How do you know you are not simply an unfair rather than a demanding marker? How do you know that you are not simply an easy grader rather than a fair one? The best way to deal with these problems is to have a set standard of performance in mind as a flexible guide to which you match the actual performance of the entire class. This gives you your original grade distribution, then this distribution can be modified as you modify individual grades according to individual effort. Suppose Jones has brought himself up at considerable effort from an initial performance of a 'D' to a low 'B'. Should his exceptional effort be rewarded in altering this 'B' to a 'B+' in comparison to Smith who began as a 'B' student and did not move one point beyond this but rather rested on it throughout the term? The answer to this question rests with your initial assumption as to whether 'effort' should count in the final evaluation along with actual performance. If you decide to reward effort, then this should be made clear to the students at the outset. You might decide that this student's effort is already represented in his final performance and that no further alteration is justified. You might decide to simply weigh his final performance higher than his initial performance to discount his poor beginning. This is a decision you must make in some cases but in most cases it may be the responsibility of the course instructor.

4. DEALING WITH DISSENT

Whatever decision you make as to the standards for the course and the final distribution, remember that you may be called upon to justify and defend this decision. So, if you haven't thought out your grading standards and final distribution, you could be in some difficulty trying to justify poorly thought out criteria when a student approaches you or some other faculty member for an explanation of his poor performance. Furthermore, criticism does occur with some frequency in philosophy courses because of the different nature of these courses. In a philosophy course the emphasis is usually on individual critical thinking and reasoning, as well as the retention of a certain body of factual information. Some studen[illegible]o well in courses which rely on the retention of a set body of information, but fail miserably when the emphasis is on individual critical thinking. An 'A' student may suddenly discover that her performance on this philosophy course is a meagre 'C' or a low 'B' and she is puzzled and upset by this turn of events. She seeks an explanation from you as to the standards and requirements for an 'A' in this course and you had better be prepared to provide some reasonable explanation. There is no easy way to deal with protests about marks, a common problem faced by most TA's. What we can say is the following:

(1) there must be some consistency in your approach to all protests, so that your resolution of one such protest is not radically different from the resolution of another similar protest,

(2) do not fear the possibility that you have made a mistake - admit it and proceed to re-assess every grade

involved if need be - without the sense that you have suffered some irreparable damage to your ego,

(3) be calm and careful - look for "snow jobs" (large or small) and don't get involved in irrelevant name calling, abuse or character assassination--stay firmly rooted in your response to the material work presented, the task assigned, the skill measured and the devices used to measure it,

(4) when confronted with interpretation differences stay on the topic of the defence or justification of the alternate interpretation rather than the fact that it may be "radical" or "conservative",

(5) resolve disputes ultimately by appeal to the individual operating the course with his intentions in mind.

5. CONCLUSION

We have discussed marking and grading in various sections of this book. In the section on Correspondence Courses, we talked about some unique problems involved with grading assignments and examinations from distance education students. In the section on Discussion groups, we talked about special problems facing a teaching assistant marking for a course in which someone else was conducting the lectures and was responsible for the overall course design and content. In this section, we talked about problems encountered by someone essentially responsible for his own course, or essentially responsible for the design and final grades for someone else's course. Some of these concerns may overlap and it may be advisable to look at the other sections indicated to get a full picture of all the questions involved with grading.

VI. INTRODUCTORY FORMAL LOGIC COURSES

Why Me? Most philosophy departments teach introductory logic courses and the classes are often large. Since the ability to do logic involves developing a skill that requires practice, there will be many tests, quizes, and assignments. The backgrounds of the students in this course vary widely, motivating all the students is one of the problems of this course.

Why Not? Being involved with a course in logic teaches you which approach and which type of text works, it can prove a test of your ability to motivate students, and, as a first TA assignment, offers the reassurance of a well planned schedule and marking scheme.

Marking: Work with the instructor to determine which mistakes are most common. Try to plan out a consistent marking scheme around these common errors. It is often easier (and faster) to mark one question at a time from the complete set of papers. Take breaks from time to time as you mark. Get the assignments and tests back as quickly as possible so students may review their errors while the material is still fresh in their minds.

Tutoring: First, you should try to determine exactly what the problem is and then go over the concept using as many examples as you can. When confronted with a large number of students, take them on as a group. Students often have problems in common. This is more time efficient for you and they will benefit from the questions of the other students.

Lecturing: The most important planning step is to prepare a large number of interesting and illustrative examples.

1. WHY ME?

In most large departments of philosophy there is at least one introductory formal logic course. These courses are generally large and deal with a specialized topic. Because these courses are large, teaching assistants or lecturers may be assigned to tutor, mark or lecture in the course. A course leader may be responsible for the overall course (all of the sections) devising quizzes, midterms, and the final examination.

The ability to do logic involves the development of a skill which is best developed through sustained practice, not detached contemplation. Thus courses in introductory logic generally involve a large number of assignments, quizzes or tests to mark and these require translating ordinary language statements into propositions capable of translation into symbolic notation so that they may be manipulated and tested. The marking and grading of such assignments is sometimes less stimulating than dealing with essay contributions, as the logic assignments probably will involve more repetition than the essays.

One has to deal with the possibility that this sort of work will be tedious. As well, one has to deal with the situation that some students just can not 'see' how certain principles or rules apply or just cannot 'see' how to arrive at certain translations from ordinary language into symbolic notation. Much practice on the part of the student and much tutoring on the part of the assistant or lecturer is needed to try to overcome this problem. Some students spend a lot of time and thought on the course with poor results, while for another student this same course is nothing more than an exercise in mechanical calculation and requires very little deep thought. Students taking such introductory logic courses vary from those with a background and interest in math and science to those with an interest in arts who are required to take the course. The abilities and interests of these two sets of individuals will vary widely and this is one of the problems facing the individual leading the course or a section of the course. There is even wide variation among 'good' students. Bright students may have difficulty seeing things correctly. The problem becomes how to motivate those who are there out of some kind of compulsion and how to sustain the interest of those for whom this course is nothing more than a mechanical diversion. Sometimes the question is how to relate aspects of the student's personal life experiences to the content of an introductory formal logic course? How do we make necessary repetitions interesting? How do we bring everyone in the class up to the best level of achievement they are capable of mastering? How do we use any interest people express in this course to encourage them to take further courses in philosophy? Some students like puzzles (paradoxes, dilemmas, etc.), some prefer a larger picture of logic, while others are interested in the history of the subject.

When an introductory formal logic course has several sections at different times conducted by different individuals, there may be a schedule established using one prescribed textbook or course outline to ensure that everyone in every section is exposed to roughly the same material. This becomes especially necessary when all sections of the course sit down to the same final examination, and when the course is used to rate the minimal general competency of individuals who may desire to go on in philosophy and require some minimal background in logic. This situation subjects the instructor to the confines of a textbook which may not be of her desired design and may not contain the content she deems either desirable or useful.

It is a bad idea to tell students that you do not like a particular textbook or a particular section. Some weak or disaffected students leap on such comments and use them as a justification for their own bad performances, or, worse, it sometimes encourages them not to try to work through the text or problems on the course.

The course instructor or supervisor should be told about problem areas where students are not doing well. In such a course, it is essential that the instructor and the marker keep in close contact with each other. If there is a problem that many students repeat in an assignment or a midterm, the instructor should be aware of it so that it may be dealt with immediately. It is also helpful if previous instructors inform both new instructors and markers of the areas in the course which prove to be the most difficult for the students.

Such a course may also subject the instructor to a schedule and timetable which she may find difficult or perhaps unrealistic (given the abilities of the particular members of her group or section) to maintain. It is important to find/devise ways for the students to see the light and most students need encouragement in this regard. Here, again, it is helpful to consult those who have taught the course before, for they will have valuable tips and explanations on methods of introducing different concepts in the course. Large sections of any introductory course are quite anonymous, and helpful observations are a valuable way of getting students to realize that there are indeed human beings at both ends of the line.

2. WHY NOT?

Thus far we have said very little about what one can gain from teaching or assisting in an introductory formal logic course. There are some things to be gained from the experience. First, teaching assistants gain ideas about what does and what does not work in a course in formal logic. One learns what sort of textbook works, what approach works, what sorts of questions are best understood and how to design a viable set of tests, assignments and final examination.

Second, teaching or assisting a course in 'pure pedagogy' (for instance, a course in introductory symbolic logic) can be useful as a test of your ability to motivate students where the issues are not of profound intellectual appeal or where part of the task is to broaden a student's perspective or appeal to a student's prior grasp of a problem area. This experience is valuable because if and when a teaching assistant becomes a full time teacher, he or she will more than likely be required at some time to teach an introductory course in formal logic.

Third, as a first exercise in teaching, a formal logic course offers the reassurance of clear schedules, carefully delineated subject matter, and established academic standards. Given these conditions, the teaching assistant can monitor his progress in giving lectures or providing explanations/remedial help through tutorials, etc. The teaching assistant's attitude to the task at hand is important, since a poorly motivated teaching assistant or lecturer will infect his students with a clear sense that this course is 'a drag' and necessary but also necessarily uninteresting.

Another advantage is that it is possible to devise a clear marking scheme for assignments, midterms, and the final exam. This allows the marker to feel that the marks that he gives are 'fair' or 'objective,' and thus removes some of the stigmas that one might face when marking essays.

Finally, while it is true that some students have difficulty 'seeing' how to solve certain problems in logic, the pleasure of experiencing the 'eureka' reaction of a student who finally discovers how a principle works seems well worth the frustration first experienced by both the student and the tutor.

3. MARKING

Marking for an introductory logic course may range from being difficult for those inexperienced in logic to being somewhat tedious for those with more experience. Below are some suggestions to cope with these problems.

a) Alleviating the Difficulty: The difficulty in marking logic may be alleviated to a certain extent by working with the instructor to determine what mistakes are most likely to occur in the assignments, midterms, and the final exam, and then determining the points to be docked for each such error. (For example, in a derivation that is worth five points, you might decide to dock one mark for each incorrect use of a derivation rule.) This process takes very little time and, if it is done across all the sections as a whole, will ensure standardized marking for all sections of the course.

b) Strategy: Marking logic is also much easier if you mark one question at a time from the complete set of papers. Doing this will make the marking go by more quickly as it allows you to concentrate on all the variations of response to each question without having to shift your attention to the other questions to be marked. This is quite similar to the way in which the final exams are marked. Usually, each person is assigned one question from the exam and she will mark that question for all sections of the course before moving along to another question. This not only helps get the marking done faster, but ensures that each question is marked consistently (against the model answer) since it is only marked by one person. This allows you also to see possible variations in response to the question and assess their legitimacy with respect to the preferred response (to the degree to which this is possible).

(WORLD)
YOU [(Qxy)]
(GOD) → Qxy
ME
THEM
(P·Q → R)·(A·B)

c) Coping with Boredom: To cope with the boredom that sometimes comes with marking, you should take breaks from time to time to ensure that your marking remains consistent and to help keep the task from seeming to take more time than it actually does. With any luck, you will have at least one student in your section who has an interesting or original style in solving logical problems. As with all other courses, it is important to provide comments to point out both where the student has excelled and where he has failed to produced a correct answer. In logic courses, it is especially important to get assignments back to the students quickly so that they may review their errors on certains sections while those sections are still fresh in their minds.

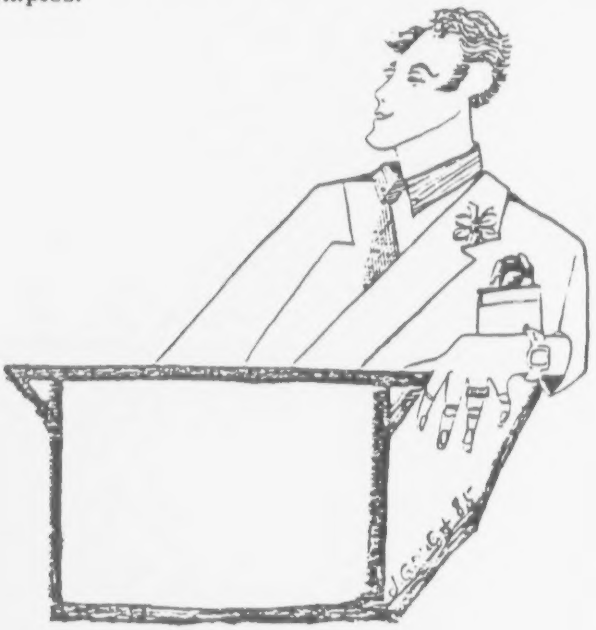
4. TUTORING

At certain points in the course, especially during the periods before midterms and the final exam, you will be required to tutor students. If only one student comes to you for help, you should first determine exactly what his problem is, and then go through an explanation of that concept using as many examples as possible. This method usually works, though the amount of time it takes varies with the individual student. If, while tutoring, it becomes apparent that the student has not looked at the text, it is not unreasonable to suggest that he do so before coming to see you again.

If you have a long line of students waiting outside your door for help, it is probably best to take them on as a group. Usually students have common problems, and helping them as a group will be more time efficient for you. It could also be better for the students as they will then have the benefit of each others' questions. In this situation, it is best to deal with the problems of each student in turn. This waiting line procedure for questions helps keep one student from dominating the session. If at any point you feel overloaded by too many questions from too large a group, you might ask someone else in the department to help you out by taking on some of your students. There are many people in the department experienced in helping students with logic who will be willing to help out from time to time.

5. LECTURING

Once you have been a TA for an introductory logic course and you are familiar with the way the course functions, it is not all that difficult to move into the role of instructor. Apart from the basic structure of your lectures (for more information on this, see the Lecture section), the most important thing is to prepare a long list of interesting and illustrative examples. It may take a bit of time and effort to prepare such a list, but the value of a good set of examples is undeniable. The best way of going about constructing a set of examples is by consulting with other instructors, referring to a variety of introductory logic texts, and by using your imagination to construct your own unique examples.



VII. CORRESPONDENCE TEACHING: MARKING, TUTORING, OPERATING

Some universities have correspondence courses fed to students on cassette tapes or straight text material. The marking, tutoring and operating of these courses presents some unique challenges to the teaching assistant.

Responding to Assignments: It is important to remember that your response to a correspondence student must be prompt and must include comments which are extensive, since face to face clarification or questioning by the student is physically impossible.

Closing the gap between student and marker: It is useful to try different approaches to closing the psychological distance felt by correspondence students who do not feel they are a part of an on-going dialogue with either the lecturer or the marker. We suggest various techniques for accomplishing this task: set up a dialogue between the marker and student such that you play the role of either "Devil's Advocate" or "Impartial Observer", couch your written responses in non-formal ways-addressing the student by her first name, etc., establish telephone links and links with other students in the course.

Individually measured growth: Correspondence students need to get a sense of their progress through your written responses to their assignments and through the pacing of assignments in terms of an increasing degree of difficulty. This may involve discounting the first assignment in the course in favour of later improvements.

Course design: Although this consideration is out of the range of the marker, some input on her part may be necessary to correct deficiencies of the course. The objectives of the course need to be clear, the assignments adequately spaced to allow for time to get them done and sent back.

1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Waterloo has an extensive programme of taped courses offered to students who study at home for a B.A. and other degrees. Sometimes graduate students are asked to TA for one of these courses. Each course is composed of a set of taped lectures, produced by the professor or professors who initiated the course, along with a set of notes which accompany the tapes. The assignments, including the final examination, are generally set by the professor (although sometimes the professor will consult the TA about the content of the final examination). These assignments are sent to the marker on scheduled dates and it is essential that the marker return them to the correspondence department on the assigned date. Late return of these assignments is known to be one of the chief complaints of correspondence students.

There could be as many as 6 assignments per term plus a final examination or as few as 3 assignments and a final examination. The length of these assignments could vary from 3 to 4 pages each to 10 to 15 pages each, depending on the course and the discretion of the professor. Marking correspondence courses is slightly different from marking on campus courses. The problems all centre around the difficulties associated with communicating with students who are located some distance from campus. In many cases they occur because of the inability of the marker/tutor to engage in direct verbal communication with the students and the students' inability to communicate with their peers. We tend to take for granted this personal verbal communication with students in on campus courses, but when we are faced with its loss we become aware of its importance. In what follows, we will suggest some ways of dealing with and compensating for this unique situation encountered in distance education. These involve re-thinking our tasks and responsibilities as markers/evaluators/communicators.

2. RESPONDING TO CORRESPONDENCE ASSIGNMENTS

Students taking correspondence courses are faced with listening to a set of tapes (usually around 20 cassette tapes) at home without the (in some cases crucial) ability to stop the lecturer with a question, puzzle or point of clarification. They do, however, have the ability to play a particular taped lecture over and over again, an ability that on campus students obviously do not share. This is an asset of taped lectures as students can make full and complete use of these lectures for an initial run through as well as for subsequent reviews of the lectures (as many reviews as they may require). A drawback of the use of this ability rests with the individual who produced the tapes. Any inconsistencies or buried incoherencies on the lecture tapes will manifest themselves as the student has the ability (not shared in on campus situations) to listen to any tape a second or third time. This, of course, is a benefit to the careful and diligent student.

Imagine yourself in a philosophy course where the intent is to encourage dialogue between the student and the teacher as well as some critical response from the student to both the textual material of the course and lecture/tape material. The verbal communication in such a course is initially one way. Not a desirable situation but one we are forced to live with and accommodate ourselves to as best we can.

We have to turn the student, in many cases, from passive recipient of information into an active critical participant in the process of forming her views and critical responses to the material presented. They have to be moved from producing primarily exegesis, summary or uncritical description of the course material: "Russell says x about y and also z about w," etc., to "Russell's views about y are defective or questionable because..." This is no easy task in an on campus course involving discussion or seminar groups; in correspondence courses this offers a major challenge to the marker/tutor.

We need to consider ways we can bring the student into something approximating a personal relationship with the marker and his responses, and with the material of the course - ways which will in some sense serve to shrink the distance and possible feelings of alienation experienced by the student. Correspondence students seem to feel this kind of alienation most particularly in philosophy courses where reasoned and critical dialogue is the accepted process or procedure and the feedback of the correct factual information is not always (ever?) encouraged. Some taped courses in philosophy are actually set up as a dialogue between two people and the student sometimes feels some frustration in not being able to join in the process to test out her own views or merely make her own comments. This frustration is generated by the actual design of some correspondence courses, where the intent seems to be to make the student believe that she is experiencing an on campus lecture when, of course, in some important respects (like the lack of ability to interrupt or get immediate feedback, etc.) she is not. There may be a case for suggesting that this intention ought to be looked at very carefully to see whether there are any other negative consequences of supposing one can transpose an on campus lecture on tape. One ought to consider the taped lecture as in some important respects different from a live lecture and produce tapes which account for this obvious fact and make allowances for the tape medium. The production of the lecture tapes is not the responsibility of the TA but she needs to be aware of how this material can be used by the student and what problems interpreting the tapes and the assignments could ensue as a result of tapes which may not be as polished as some lectures.

3. CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN STUDENT AND MARKER

As these distance courses are set up, the only way the student discovers whether he or she is 'on the right track' is when she receives her graded assignment back in the mail (hopefully, but by no means always within a reasonable time frame - within 1 to 2 weeks). It is, therefore, imperative that the students be encouraged to communicate on assignments or by separate post any questions or puzzles they might have. It is also imperative that the marker respond to these as soon as possible, since communication by mail is notoriously slow. Time plays a role in dulling the "fresh" and immediate response the student is able to make to the material with which he is confronted.

When a philosophy text is read for the first time the student should produce in the margin copious critical responses to the material, setting up a silent but useful quasi-dialogue between reader and writer. This information proves useful as the text is re-read and critical responses are sharpened, but its value derives initially from the "immediacy" of this procedure, and this value is lost when there is a protracted time delay between the time the text is read and the student's later response to it. In an on campus course the student has the added option of taking these initial questions or puzzles to the instructor and having her direct you to the appropriate reference material which would serve to substantiate your objections or help to prove them wrong. Alternatively, he could show you immediately how they are defective criticisms or elaborations of the text - how they fail, or where they succeed and how they could be expanded or elaborated to give the criticism more impact or a wider range of application.

As markers/teachers we need to play both 'Devil's Advocate' and 'Impartial Observer' when evaluating the work of students and sometimes this (interestingly enough) places us in some obvious conflict with the views expressed in the text or on the tapes. This situation should be made abundantly clear to both the on campus and correspondence student, so that he does not perceive himself confronting some Janus-like character whose position fluctuates from comment to comment or sentence to sentence. The proliferation of positions or views from those expressed in the text to those expressed on the tapes or in the discussion groups to those expressed by the marker is not a drawback but an asset which the student can use to good advantage as he shops in a well stocked market of ideas. The feedback in the classroom or seminar situation is more or less immediate and you can get on with a developed criticism which is 'on the right track' from the outset. But this situation of immediate response does not exist for the correspondence student whose access to library facilities may even be severely limited.

As markers, we could suggest the student attempt to contact knowledgeable individuals in her community in order to discuss some of the issues from the course, or in order to 'play back' some of her critical views or arguments. If there is even limited access to a library, then the resources available should be noted and their use noted by the marker. It is incumbent on the experienced marker or tutor to attempt to anticipate problems that this student could encounter as she progresses into the remaining assignments of the course or the final examination. If, for example, there is some indication that the student does not fully comprehend a particularly important concept or make use of a particularly important device which will produce more severe problems later on in the course, then obviously the marker should note this problem in its initial stages, and make some effort to attempt to eliminate it. A student could use a term in its everyday sense which turns out to be misleading when used in a philosophy course in which technical senses become more important. Clearing up this use of "mind" or "evil" could be important from the outset to avoid later problems with ambiguities and possible equivocations. For example, if a student does not seem to be aware of all the steps he must go through in order to evaluate an argument or seems to be unaware of the difference between expressing an opinion and defending a position or central claim, then these fundamental problems need to be cleared up before the situation continues into subsequent assignments. If it looks as if this could be a general problem experienced by many students then a tutorial tape could be returned to all the students in the course outlining the problem and offering some possible ways this problem could be avoided or overcome. This issue deserves more attention than we can give it here, but we will suggest some possible ways of dealing with it.

4. ESTABLISHING A PERSONAL RAPPORT

It is imperative that the marker/tutor of the course try to establish some kind of rapport with the student, set up some sort of 'written' dialogue with her beyond the impersonal response of a grade. First, tutorial tapes may be sent to all students in the course in which the marker can introduce herself and address herself to some problems experienced by some or a majority of the students taking the course. This too, however, remains somewhat impersonal. If possible, it is useful to allow the student to respond to the lecturer's comments and return the tape.

As well (and only if possible within personal time constraints) it is sometimes helpful to provide a telephone number where you can be reached in the daytime so that you can respond to questions (the kind that seem to occur frequently just prior to the final examination). In some cases, a department may accept collect calls from correspondence students. In other cases, the student will pay for the call herself. Second, when marking assignments it is useful to indicate who you are; that is, indicate your name (by signing your page of comments) and indicate that you are the marker for this course (since in many cases the students do not know that someone other than the person on the taped lectures is grading/marking their papers). Third, if you have input into the actual set-up or design of the course, then it may be useful to have the students provide a mini-biography to accompany their first assignment to acquaint you with their background to give you the sort of information you might acquire informally from talking with them after class in an on campus course.

In some correspondence course notes, a mini-bio is provided of the individual who produced the course and many students have found this information useful. We also promote a student mini-bio, which allows the marker to 'plug into' some aspects of the student's background experience which could be used as the source of interesting examples or as a reference point for comparison. For example, to make a point more interesting or relevant, the marker may find it useful to refer the student to experiences from his background or situations he might have encountered in his work situation (this has proved particularly useful in such diverse courses as Ethics and Critical Thinking). We do not wish to place too much emphasis on this 'relevancy' strategy but merely point out that it does have some heuristic value along with other approaches.

Fourth, (and unfortunately this too sounds like a trivial point) try to remember to welcome students to the course in your opening comments as you respond to their first assignment, this serves to break down the impersonal borders which seem to attach themselves to these kinds of courses. Remember how formal you may appear as you respond in a letter to someone you do not know. Your style becomes quite 'business-like' and 'impersonal' but it is just this style of response which correspondence students wish to see less of - they get a formal set of notes, well prepared tapes which may in fact 'drone on' and they seek out a response which is not so formal and much more personal. They need to know that they are a unique individual who receives a personal response to their work, not a set of blanket comments covering in a very general way all the assignments received for the course.

To get a perspective on some of the problems facing a correspondence student engaged in a program of distance education, consider the following composite picture of just such a student. After a full day of work either in the home or at some office/plant, you come home and finish you supper. Now you must try and find some time of your own which you can carve out from the time you devote to your family and friends in order to listen to some lecture tapes of a philosophy course considering such abstract problems as the Prisoner's Dilemma or Venn Diagrams. Now ask yourself: Could you muster up the initiative, drive or self-motivation (direction) needed to follow through on a course in this kind of isolated situation? This kind of self-motivation is not always found in on campus students as we all well know.

5. THE PRODUCTION OF COMMENTS OR EVALUATIONS

When producing comments/evaluations of correspondence assignments, try to indicate (in your written or taped response) clearly and precisely where they have produced a good response, how it could be improved and what possible objections he should be aware of in opposition to it. Do this, as well, with problem areas in the assignment. This can best be done by underlining or boxing in the passage you wish to focus attention on and ascribing a number to it, then on a separate page you can elaborate your response to this part of the paper in the fullest possible way. This must be done as clearly, and comprehensively as possible since this written communication is, in most cases, the only response the student will receive to her efforts. Unlike on campus courses, she cannot ask you what you meant by 'deviant approach' and what precisely she should do about correcting it. Indicate, as well, where the student could seek assistance/information/guidance from the text(s) or the lecture tapes (perhaps citing page and paragraph references, etc.). In other words, try to promote some integration which incorporates all avenues of the course so that the student can readily see and make use of material which is immediately available. This implies, of course, that the marker has listened to all the tapes and read all the notes thoroughly. It also implies that the marker has discussed the overall strategy of the course with the instructor who created and designed it, in order to get some sense of the major aims the course is designed to meet.

It is desirable to include a separate page of your comments in which you begin by making some very general (an impressionistic overview) comments or observations about the whole paper, then you may proceed to focus in on particular problem areas indicated in the student's text by the numbers you have ascribed to particular areas of the paper or assignment and ending with some further general expository observations about how the student should approach future assignments. The numbered comments on a separate sheet of paper permit you to provide elaborate comments which might include: a possible counter-argument to the one offered by the student, a possible counter-example to the general claim made by the student, an example which might be used to reinforce the critical point made by the student, another reference source the student has not considered but which could be useful to reinforce or question the claim cited in her paper, suggestions as to how the student could state her point differently and perhaps more clearly or forcefully.

It is also helpful (since students feel a good deal of isolation taking a correspondence course) to indicate how other students have fared on this same assignment, where they have gone wrong and what they have done right. It is sometimes reassuring to know that you are not the only one who has made a particular mistake. Again, this information cannot be obtained by the student himself from his peers since he has no connection with them so it is incumbent on the marker to try to bridge this problem by presenting some overview of how the rest of the class performed on the assignment. Some students find it helpful - reassuring perhaps - to know how they are performing the tasks of the course in relation to other members of the class.

Sometimes it can be helpful, but other times it can be intimidating if a sample (with names suitably deleted) of the best answer to a particular assignment is enclosed with the student's returned and graded assignment (this could, perhaps, be modified by enclosing a sample of the worst answer as well). In one course, we have opted for sending back a representative 'sampling' of a cross section of all the answers received.

This approach has its limitations which become obvious when the class size is particularly large and the turn around time for the return of the graded assignments is fast approaching. As well, we need to consider this strategy in relation to some learners' desires to remain independent, setting their own goals and designing their own strategies for achieving them. For example, often correspondence students (unlike most on campus students) will remark that they are taking this course out of 'interest' only with little or no concern for the achieved grade. These students are concerned primarily with your written response, evaluation, or comments on their views or interpretation and not at all with how any other student responded to the assignment.

Address the student by his/her first name and end your comments by signing your name. This puts some (albeit minimal) touch of personal contact into your response. You could also provide a telephone number where you could be reached during certain hours of the day. Correspondence students will sometimes spend their own money and call long distance to get a response or to promote some kind of personal contact. This strategy has its drawbacks as well as its good points. Some students will call merely to get some 'hints' on the content of the final examination or to plead for an extension of the due date for an assignment, parading a host of personal problems before you for your empathetic consideration.

The excuses you get from students in correspondence courses is both varied and interesting; like the woman who wrote to explain that she was late submitting her assignments because someone had broken into her apartment and stolen her tape recorder and lecture notes and nothing else - leaving an expensive stereo and colour TV. She suspected her estranged husband who never approved of the intellectual pursuits she followed. Or the man who wrote to explain the delay in his assignments by claiming that his dog ate his eyeglasses and that he had subsequently been unable to read the note or assignments until the optometrist was able to produce another pair of reading glasses. I never found out whether the dog experienced any indigestion or perhaps some sort of eye strain. One woman, who lived on the coast of British Columbia, could not travel to the final exam because she had broken her arm and could not start her outboard motor. As a general rule, it seems best to be as understanding as possible in this kind of situation.

As we mentioned earlier, many students experience a sense of isolation they are incapable of sharing with their peers, and this isolation includes the inability to talk about personal problems with their contemporaries. But, despite this proviso the situation is in some ways no different from what you would face as a tutor for an on campus course once the word gets out that you will be responsible for the bulk of the grading. Most of the students who use the phone seem to do so to get crucial information or insights that they did not think to ask about through written correspondence, or that just occurred to them as they prepared for an assignment or the final examination. Some simply need reassurance that they are capable of completing the course and have the ability to survive the final examination. For these students the telephone line is a vital and important link to the tutor or the marker.

6. GRADING CORRESPONDENCE ASSIGNMENTS

A grade for an assignment or examination in a correspondence course needs careful consideration, in part because of the points we raised earlier. To assess the performance of a particular student, say Jones, we need to consider what Smith and the other students in the class have been able to do with the same material. But, unlike the situation an on campus course, this procedure needs to be qualified, for Smith and Jones cannot benefit in seminars or discussions from viewing or hearing each other's comments, approaches or contributions on a particular topic. One way to try to overcome this problem is to provide all students who are willing to participate with an exchange list of names and phone numbers and addresses of other students prepared to engage in communication on topics in the course and/or exchange assignments, etc. We have attempted this strategy but it has met with limited success.

At any rate, the problem remains that students generally work in isolation. They do not have the opportunity to rate themselves against other members of the class, and benefit from the knowledge and responses of their peers either informally (after a class in the coffee shop) or formally. (I should note here, however, that this isolation is not a problem for all correspondence students as some of them may actually prefer their isolation and independence from the social constraints of an on campus course.) Compounding this situation, the marker must face the fact that students are at various stages of intellectual or academic development. Student Jones, may be a retired army officer who has decided at age 67 to attempt to complete a B.A. degree, while Student Smith may be an on campus student on a work term break or a between term break who decides to fill out her program by taking another course in philosophy to complete her 4th year of an honours degree. Or, Student Mona may be a housewife who has decided to broaden her 'horizons' by taking her first course in philosophy between the other activities of her hectic day. It is necessary, then, as much as possible to get to know the situation of these students to measure accurately their potential and their progress through the course, as each begins from a different starting point. At the same time, of course, the standards for performance in the course itself must be somehow maintained and balanced against the individual's performance potential.

7. INDIVIDUALLY MEASURED GROWTH

A short one page biography (as we mentioned earlier) produced by each student and handed in with the first assignment is very helpful in this regard in gauging a student's access point into the course. It may also be advisable to weigh the first assignment low in relation to succeeding assignments so that the student will be given full credit for any progress she makes, and so that the student can see that she is making progress in relation to her abilities at the outset of the course.

So, mark the first assignment in terms of its actual content, but provide numerous comments. In this way the student can correct problems on future assignments and begin to progress to the highest grade he is capable. When grading the final examination, it is desirable to have some examples representing grade ranges previously achieved by individuals - a sample set of papers in the C-range, B-range and A-range would be helpful to insure that your grading standards are in touch with those of the professor who designed the course.

In some cases (depending on the course), it may be possible to either consider the first assignment as a 'throw away' in terms of a grade, or to discount the grade achieved on this assignment in favour of giving greater weight to the rest of the assignments used to calculate the overall grade average. In this way the student gets a 'taste' of how he will be evaluated without his overall term average being affected. It shows him where he stands and what he must do to improve his grade on future assignments. This is particularly important with philosophy courses where the student must learn not just a corpus of factual material, but an 'approach' to dealing with this material, an ability to evaluate critically the material in front of him, or a way of manipulating it to show that he understands its underlying structure.

8. SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF COURSE DESIGN

Thus far we have said very little about the design of correspondence courses. Both the instructor and the marker can have some important impact on this aspect of a particular course. The marker/tutor may want to bring certain problems with the design (and even content) of a particular course to the attention of the individual who produced it. There is no hard and fast rule here, but most instructors find such information provided by a marker useful, especially when the instructor faces the task of ultimately upgrading or re-doing the course. Here, then, are some suggestions as to what to look for in the design of a correspondence course in philosophy:

1. Are the objectives of the course clear and do they match what is expected in the assignments and on the final examination?

2. Are the assignments for the course sufficiently well spaced that the student has a chance to get feedback on one assignment before she produces the next one? If not, then, whenever possible, one assignment time slot should be left blank to allow for mailing problems and to ensure that every student has received the last assignment and had time to consider the comments made on it before mailing the next one (and possibly needlessly repeating major mistakes in approach or style over and over again).

3. Are the assignments graduated so that they start out relatively easy and gradually get more difficult as the student develops his ability to deal with the material in the course? This is important. Students generally (not just correspondence students) like to see themselves progressing through gradually ascending tasks which become more challenging as they go on. They like to be able to see or experience a measure of their own progress in the course. Boredom quickly sets in if the tasks assigned are merely repetitive, with no movement beyond a certain minimal level of achievement. Since a correspondence

student is generally working on his own, he needs to be able to make these discoveries of measured progress himself.

4. Are there two possible 'streams' for the student to follow in the course, or only one? A two 'stream' course, for example, would have one fixed set of assigned tasks for all students to achieve a graded outcome and a second set of tasks added to the first for those students who wanted more practice, examples or just a more stimulating overall course. There are some students in on campus as well as correspondence courses who want a more challenging course, but as correspondence courses exist as one package, provision needs to be built into this package for those who want more. This has some practical drawbacks from the marker's point of view since it could increase the workload of assignments he will be required to evaluate. The need for a two stream course becomes apparent when you correspond with students who take correspondence course out of interest and who are not concerned with the grade at all. This may be the only course they are currently enrolled in and they have time to do a more elaborate course than other students.

5. Does the course you are involved with provide a suggested list of 'follow up' courses for those students who want to go on and take further courses in philosophy? This is a useful addition to any set of course material (provided there are further courses which follow logically from this one) as some students become 'smitten' and want to pursue their studies further and some simply want to see how this course fits into a general (or honours?) programme in philosophy.

6. Is there sufficient provision made for reviewing previous

material or concepts built into the course material (either the tapes or the text material) and are there 'check points' built into the course material for the student to monitor his progress to date? For example, does the lecturer say something like: "Up to this point in the course you should have mastered the use of the following concepts..., to see whether or not you have, test yourself using the enclosed Quiz 2. If you did not perform well on the test go back and review sections 3, 4 and 6 and try the Quiz again before going on to the next part of the course?"

7. Does the instructor deal with possible problems with the course and the course contents in the tapes or the textual material in an attempt to anticipate and deal with certain common mistaken approaches or procedures? Sometimes the marker is in a better position to see where something the instructor has said on the tapes has not worked the way he intended whereas some students mis-interpret his remarks or mis-apply crucial concepts. Sometimes students assume that minor aspects of a course are intended to be taken as major components, when just the reverse is intended by the instructor. The instructor, after all, has no direct feedback to gauge how his course is being received and how what he says is being interpreted. The marker in many cases (but not all, since the instructor could also mark his own course) is in a unique position to see what parts of the course are working as intended and which are not working at all or working poorly. This situation creates some responsiblity on his part to offer suggestions about revisions or alterations as advocate of the student and as a responsible professional. Furthermore, any problems with a correspondence course should be brought to the attention of the creator of the course so that alterations in it can be made as soon as possible.

VIII. PROBLEMS

Plagiarism: In this section we deal with various problems that the instructor/teaching assistant is likely to face sometime in her career. Starting with the most difficult and serious problem of plagiarism, we trace out some possible strategies for dealing with it.

Cheating: Some students attempt to use one piece of work from one course to satisfy the requirements of two or more courses. We offer some suggestions for preventing and dealing with this problem.

Finally, we attempt to sort out some character types who could present some problems to the new lecturer or new teaching assistant operating a discussion group.

Incessant Talker: This student presents a problem of overkill and interference with the smooth operation of a rational discussion group. Several possible ways of dealing with this individual are explored.

Continual disputers: In some sense philosophy courses seem to attract those individuals who want to dispute every claim, just for the sake of being disputatious.

Neurotics and Advanced Students: These individuals need special attention but not too much. Both the neurotic and the advanced student take up a good deal of your time and you need to consider ways of giving them just the amount of time each is entitled to and no more.

We end with a discussion of some of the problems that could occur when you get involved in your personal life with students in your class. There is a need to maintain a professional attitude and to keep the domain of one's personal life separate from the professional.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many problems that you may be faced with as a teaching assistant. Our purpose in this chapter is not to offer you solutions to these problems, but instead to start a discussion of these problems that will help you to work your way to your own solutions. Problems like cheating and plagiarism vary from case to case, and so must any solution to them.

2. PLAGIARISM

One of the most difficult problems facing a beginning teacher in philosophy is the problem of plagiarism: the stealing of ideas from someone else and calling them your own.

The university defines plagiarism as follows:

> Plagiarism is the act of presenting the ideas and words of another as one's own. The use of other people's ideas or words must be properly acknowledged and referenced. This applies to all written materials such as essays, laboratory reports, work term reports, design projects, statistical data, computer programs, and research results. The properly acknowledged use of sources is an accepted and important part of scholarship. Use of such material without acknowledgement, however, is contrary to accepted norms of academic behaviour.

Here are some instances where I have encountered plagiarism. I offer the following cases as only a selective (and not necessarily a representative) set of examples, to show that: (1) one needs to look carefully at the entire situation in which the purported offense occurs, taking account of the variations from situation to situation, (2) it is difficult to stereotypically portray a 'typical' case of plagiarism, (3) some forms of plagiarism shade into and involve other areas of 'questionable academic behaviour.'

Case 1: A science/technology undergraduate student is required to take an introductory arts elective course to fill out his program. He takes a philosophy course and writes a paper (in lieu of doing a mid-term examination) on Karl Marx. The paper begins with some clumsily written remarks about Marx being a political philosopher of some importance, etc., and then launches into a very literate defence of Marx's notion of Dialectical Materialism. The contrast between the poorly written two opening paragraphs and the remainder of the paper triggered an immediate response which did not include speculations about the possibility of the writer suffering from some multiple personality disorder. I expected some wringing of hands when I confronted the perpetrator, but instead got the frank response that he had indeed copied the material from a textbook on Marx but did not understand the problem. I pointed out to him that there were no quotation marks around the 90% of the paper he had copied, nor was there any reference to the source (the lack of a bibliography and footnotes in this paper, I must admit, was another clue to the possible forgery). What would you do in this case, when the writer claims he is a science student and has had no exposure to the rules for writing papers in the humanities and did not know he was supposed to quote and reference his sources - 'paraphrasing' and 'precise' were two words which he was unaware of from past experience. I leave the solution of this case to the reader. Some possibilities: (1) an automatic failure for the course, (2) a failure for this assignment, with the grade on this assignment averaged into the final grade, (3) a failure for this effort but the possibility of re-doing the assignment for a better grade, following the proper guidelines. Careful consideration of the particular situation may serve to shed more light on the best possible solution, rather than treating all cases in the abstract as susceptible to exactly the same solution.

Here is another case, even more blatant. Case 2: A student does not show up all term for the lectures in an introductory philosophy course. Previously this course had been taught by someone else and it was essentially a different introductory course, with different textbooks, different emphasis and a different set of topics for essay questions. Just before the final exam our distant student shows up to the instructor's office with his required mid-term essay in hand, apologizing profusely for its lateness and citing some plausible causes for this situation. I accept the late essay, but before our intrepid student leaves the office I chance to glance at the first title and the first page of the essay. The paper was on Descartes, 'but wait a minute,' I protest 'We didn't even mention Descartes in this course.' The student is shocked, he read the outline of the course and he got a copy of the topics from a student in last term's version of the course and produced the paper. When I explained to him that I could not accept this paper for this course he was very upset. It is, after all, a philosophy paper and a good one at that because the person I got it from got an A for it last time. His goose was cooked. Not only did he try to pawn off a paper that was not for the course taught, he tried to pawn off a plagiarized paper. I again, leave the solution of this case to the reader, but I think it is fairly clear that this individual did not pass the course.

Finally, Case 3: An intrepid teaching assistant is grading papers for an introductory philosophy course. He is marking for a course whose content and essay topics are eternal, not varying from eon to eon. He discovers a paper which is very familiar to him, for it is his paper. How did his paper get into the hands of a student unknown to him? He then remembers that in a moment of economic weakness, he sold one of his better undergraduate papers to an 'Essay Mill' located underground on campus (for a paltry sum, considering its obvious value). Now our graduate student has a problem. What is his solution: (1) disclose the fraudulent paper and risk having to disclose how he became aware of the situation, (2) give the paper a poor grade and see if the student comes forward to complain, and if he does, quiz him on crucial aspects of the paper to ferret out his obvious ignorance and expose his fraud, (3) grade the paper high (since, obviously, he knows it is a good paper) as it deserves and forget the incident. What should he do?

Obviously, most cases of plagiarism are not as simple to detect as the ones I have listed above. Do not be discouraged if you fail to detect a case of plagiarism, which later comes to light. It happens to the best of teachers, and somehow an attitude of optimistic naivety seems preferable to jaded cynicism. If you do encounter what you believe to be a genuine (?) case of plagiarism, confirm your findings by discussing them with another knowledgeable individual (without disclosing the identity of the accused) and consult with your Department chairman or advisor about the appropriate procedures to follow. Few of us want to play policeman, but if a good number of individuals get away with this fraud then this reflects poorly on the academic standards of a particular Department or university. The best situation is to discuss or provide a handout with the clear instructions that 'plagiarism' and 'double use' as well as other forms of cheating are not allowed and those engaged in them face certain specified penalties.

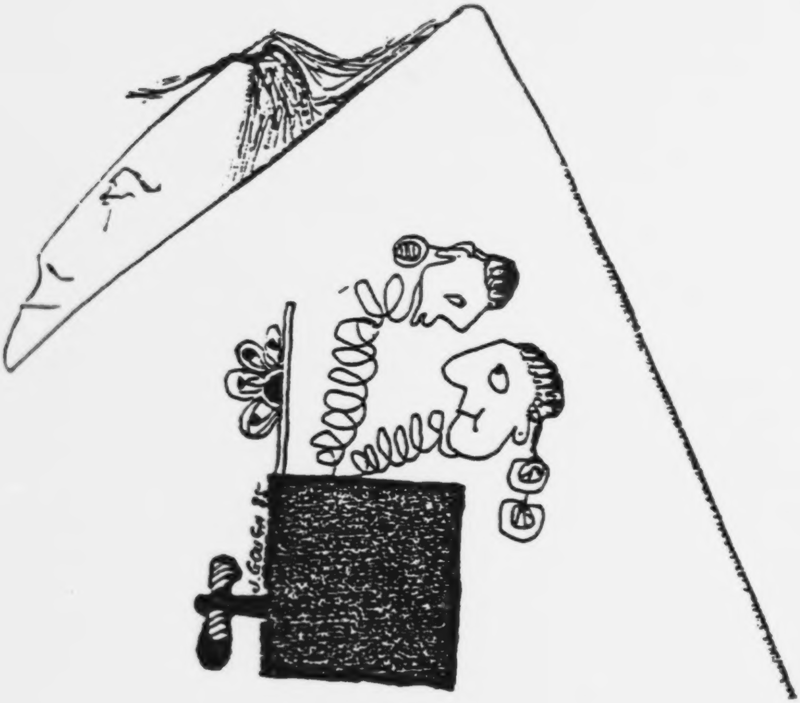
Of course, there are other cases that are more difficult to deal with for other reasons. For example, someone may write a paper with long, acknowledged excerpts from textbooks and much of it is only slightly paraphrased. The source has been acknowledge but the paraphrasing is very minimal. This could be a problem with the techniques used to write a paper rather than any intended cheating, so cases like this may have to be dealt with differently. What we need to do is point out problems with the way the student is using outside material in her papers and suggest ways to improve these techniques.

3. CHEATING

There is at least one other way of cheating than plagiarism. This could be called the 'double use' strategy and it works like this: I produce a paper for course A, it is accepted so well I decide to make double use of it and re-submit it for course B. This approach is very efficient, for now I am able to receive two grades for the same piece of work thereby making the most use of my time and effort. The university condemns this strategy in the following way:

> Submitting an essay, report or assignment to satisfy some or all of the requirements of a course when that essay, report, or assignment has been previously submitted or is concurrently being submitted for another course without the express permission of the professor(s) involved.

This strategy, like plagiarism, is a form of fraud. When an original piece of work is required for an assignment in a course, it is expected that the piece has been produced just for this course (not to do double duty). This form of cheating may obviously be very difficult to spot, unless you do not clearly assign precise and distinct topics for your course and discover that something very well done is miles off topic but quite close to the approach taken by another instructor, or answers precisely the sort of question asked in another course in the Department. This form of fraud is more subtle than plagiarism because: (1) there is no stealing material from another person and calling it your own, (2) it is the inappropriate use of research produced for one course in another course, (3) it is more difficult to detect since it is not unusual for one essay, for example, to satisfy 'roughly' the same requirements for two courses, (4) some individual teachers may not object to one piece of research doing double duty.

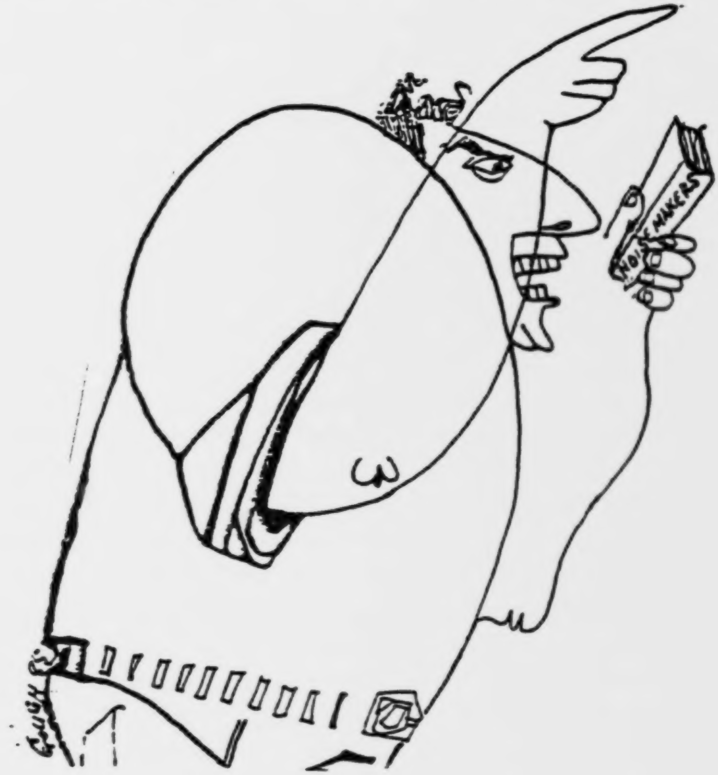


Here is a case in point. A student takes two courses. One is a survey course in the history of philosophy, which covers some of the work of Descartes. The other course is a course devoted exclusively to the work of the philosopher Descartes. In the second course, an essay topic is assigned on some specific aspect of Descartes' work and the student does the research and the essay for this topic. In the first course the instructor allows the students to consult her regarding possible mid-term essay topics from any of the work of the philosophers studied. Our ingenious student takes his outline from the paper he has already produced for the second course to the instructor of the first course and they agree in consultation that he should do a paper on this topic (she is impressed by the depth of his prior understanding of the topic and his enthusiastic desire to pursue it). The student, of course, does not divulge his double use of the topic and the research for the essay. What should we do in this case and, perhaps more importantly, how should we try to prevent it from occuring? The answer is again a two-fold one. First, make it clear from the outset of the course that no 'double use' is permitted. Second, design specific and precise essay topics that will attempt to guard against double use. Again, there may be "grey areas" in the determination of these cases as well. For example, two papers could involve considerable overlap in content, but in fact deal with different aspects of essentially the same topic. One could produce two papers on Sartre's views on aesthetics from two different perspectives. Should they count as two papers or should they count as essentially one paper taking two perspectives of the same topic?

4. PROBLEM STUDENTS

Problem students come in many shapes and varieties, so that the following list of types is best seen as selective. In no way can I hope to capture the variety and nuances of some of these character types but permit me to sketch out the scenario anyway. Consider the following types:

a) The Incessant Talker: Some people seem to dislike the group situation in which they are not the focus of attention. They shift the focus of attention in a lecture situation away from the lecture and the class generally, or the lecturer and some other member of the class, to a situation in which they alone occupy the spotlight. Some people verbalize or give voice to all of their thoughts - those that are appropriately verbalized and those inner thoughts that are not (especially those that they have not considered carefully or subjected to censure or critical analysis). Some people view the lecture/classroom situation as equivalent to the social setting found in the coffee shop or cafeteria, where one discusses upcoming parties, dates, gossip or the condition of the weather. Some people generally produce incessant noise which has the effect of interfering with the communication between one student and the lecturer or the lecturer and the majority of the class. There are various procedures the lecturer can employ to alleviate this situation: (1) ask the student to leave to discuss his non-course related affairs in a more appropriate situation, (2) ask the student if he has some contribution to make to the lecture/discussion and, if not, would he refrain from talking, (3) ask the student to stop his noise, (4) stare down the student by first ceasing to attempt to compete with him for attention by stopping your discussion and looking directly at him for the appropriate response: silent attention. The problem, of course, is how to do this tactfully.



b) Continual Disputers: There are two types of disputants in a philosophy class; those who offer constructive criticisms or engage in constructive scepticism, and those who generate destructive criticisms or engage in destructive scepticism. The former sub-group should, within reason, be encouraged in both philosophy lectures and discussion. They provide the lecturer with valuable insights as to how well what she is attempting to convey is being accepted or understood by members of the class. The latter sub-group, however, generally interject criticisms and sceptical remarks which are designed to embarrass the lecturer and/or impress him with the student's newly learned skill of sceptically questioning every assertion and/or every second question. The lecturer, if she falls for this trap, is forced into the position of defending every statement against all possible, and a lot of impossible, counter-examples, counter-possibilities or sceptical disclaimers. It becomes clear, after a while, that the destructive-type can have a devastating effect on the operation of either a lecture or a discussion group.

In extreme cases the communication of ideas grinds to a halt and other students get bored and uneasy as the lecturer stops a train of thought to answer all and every objection. The amount of material you thought you were going to be able to communicate within the weeks allocated for the course is diminished as time is used up dealing with this disputant's every whim. Sometimes class members themselves will openly challenge this person's right to monopolize the class time and effectively cause him to pare down the amount of time he uses up with his remarks. If this does not happen, the lecturer may have to suggest that the disputant bring up his objections after the alloted class time. When this does happen, the lecturer can point out the fundamental difference between constructive scepticism and destructive scepticism and how the former rather than the latter is the most useful approach from the standpoint of a learning experience. Whereas in the latter one learns only the use of a technique, the former approach allows the student to apply a technique in critical analysis of the course material or his interpretation of it in light of some other views or beliefs he holds. In other words, the constructive approach is more conducive to insightful knowledge than the latter. As well, it may be useful to point out that it is best to wait for the full disclosure of a view or theory before offering criticism of it since some criticisms may be dealt with in the full explanation of, or description of, a particular view or theory.

c) Perpetual Neurotics: Some students occupy a great deal of a lecturer's time expressing their latent fears of failure or inadequacy. They need to perform well in university and in this course in particular (because of family or peer pressure or some desire to overcome a felt sense of inadequacy) and they need the lecturer's assurances that they are doing well on particular assignments and on the course in general. Sometimes the problem results from the fact that they have accepted or set their standards of performance too high. They believe they are or should be 'A' students but in fact they perform at about a 'low B' or 'middle C' range.

Obviously the practice of amateur psychoanalysis should be avoided, but some suggestions can still be offered to deal with these individuals. If the case seems extreme, then obviously counselling or professional help is the best solution. But, if the case seems a minor but irritating problem then some other approaches may be attempted. First, your in class and out of class time is a fixed commodity which needs to be apportioned fairly and reasonably. If some initial attempts to allay the student's fears prove unfruitful, then you might suggest that she talk about her problems with her peers. If the situation occurs at the beginning of a course and it looks from her response to the first assignment that she is unlikely to achieve the goals she is aiming at, then it might be suggested she drop this course in favour of another one.

d) Advanced Students: In some courses one encounters students for whom the course material is too simple or basic. If it is not required by some regulation that the student take this course as part of her program, then you should suggest that she drop it in favour of a more advanced course in the same subject (providing this advanced course does not have the current one as a prerequisite). If it is not possible for the student to move into a more advanced course, then to keep her from withering away from sheer boredom, it may be necessary to offer advanced assignments (this is the value alluded to earlier of the two-stream approach to designing courses: See Correspondence) which offer more complexity and thought to keep her interest stimulated.

It may also be useful to offer such students the opportunity to deliver a lecture on material they research for the course - or, to at least deliver part of a lecture or discussion. At both ends of the spectrum, the slow learner and the advanced student each require more of the lecturer's time and effort outside the classroom. The advanced student's interest could also be channeled into research projects involved with material in the course or with the design of the course generally. When a student complained that he felt the level of the material offered in an introductory course was too simple but that he understood the need for going slowly given the general abilities of the rest of the class, I suggested he research a topic from the course and the general design of the course to match the possible interests/abilities of advanced students. The project was a challenging one for him and he produced many interesting and some very useful suggestions.

e) Grade grabbers: There are individuals, at least one of whom shows up for every introductory undergraduate class in philosophy, who spend a lot of their time and "your" time disputing a grade or attempting to argue themselves into a higher grade. They may need a higher grade for some good reason or they may simply like the challenge of using whatever rhetorical skills they have to increase their grade. The TA has a couple of options. First, she can direct the student to the individual conducting the course and be done with it. Or, she can attempt to resolve the issue herself. To do the latter she should be clear that she has provided the best evaluation of the student's work she can and be confident that this attempt is not a reflection on her ability to provide a fair and equitable grade for work in the course. Having assured herself that this is the case, then she should decide to devote as much time to the discussion of this individual's grade as it deserves. You can waste a great deal of time over issues as insignificant as two or three points gained on a minor term assignment. Having decided that it is worth devoting some time to a consideration of the student's problem, you then need to resolve the dispute in favour of the merit of the student's work on the paper rather than some espoused need he may have for a higher grade. In discussions sometimes these two issues get confused: (1) "I deserve a higher grade" and (2) "I need a higher grade". Be as impartial as you can about your assessment or if you decide you have said all you can about the issue, then either decide to stick to your original assessment or decide to send the disputer on to a higher court - either the individual conducting the course or some other faculty member who could deal with it (or the chairman). But first try to convince the individual of the merits of your assessment and how it relates to the requirements of the course and the general performance of other members of the class. Again, there are no easy answers to this problem but you lose nothing if you decide to reconsider your assessment of the paper or assignment in favour of the student.

Be careful to keep the distinction between considerations of type (1) and type (2) separate. Often the student, failing to convince you that he deserves a higher grade moves on to try and convince you to raise the grade because of some espoused need (2). Wearing you down and shifting from considerations in (1) to considerations in (2) are sometimes part of the student's strategy. However, considerations of need often take you outside the area of the course itself. The student needs a higher grade to maintain a certain average in order to pass or achieve a scholarship or whatever. Now you have to consider what stance you should take towards this course in relation to the student's overall performance. Now you may need to consider whether or not this course is a required course for this student and how it fits into his overall degree aspirations. Is it your responsibility to help this student maintain a certain overall grade average? Has the student performed to the best of his ability and is the grade on this course likely to greatly reduce his overall average in a way which is disproportionate to his other grades? If you decide that it is not your responsiblity to concern yourself with the student's overall average, then that ought to provide an end to the discussion.

5. RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

When dealing with students in a lecture situation, the best approach could be characterized as: Interested and concerned detachment. You might well ask how such an apparently contradictory approach is even possible. We need to show some interest and concern with the situations of students in our class both for their in class and out of class problems and situations. At the same time, however, we need to maintain a distance, a compassionate detachment from their out of class lives. To the degree that out of class personal problems affect a student's performance, we might offer helpful advice about possible solutions or courses of action. But our interest and involvement should stop here. This is the point at which detachment becomes the paramount strategy. We always flirt with possible complications and danger when we attempt to make the concerns of someone else our own.

To get directly involved with the life (not just the in class life) of a student courts problems. Any such involvement invites emotional entanglements (a contemporary buzz-word for which I apologize) which has a tendency to lead to a relationship much more involved and generating many more personal commitments than the standard student-teacher relationship. The move here is a serious one in that it involves a fundamental change from a relatively fixed and simple relationship to one more involved and unstable (at least at the beginning). One can cite the cliches of professionalism and the need to be both objective in practice and to be seen or perceived to be objective by those affected by your decisions - involving grades and assessments. A special, personal relationship with one student from the class (or, if you have the ability, more than one but presumably less than 300), may create the impression in other members of the class that the assessment of this student's in class performance is affected by the special relationship - which appears manifestly unfair. A lecturer's credibility comes into question as well as her ability to separate personal concerns from the concerns of her vocation.

Whatever attempts may be made to diminish it, lecturers/ teachers stand in an authority relationship to students by virtue of the requirement that they set and evaluate examinations, give grades, etc. Implicit in this relationship is the assumption (obviously not recognized by everyone) that the lecturer should not misuse her position of authority to her own advantage and to the detriment of the profession generally and the Department particularly. It is obviously fallacious to grossly generalize from one isolated situation to all others, but it is clear that if one member of a Department behaves unethically - or, is perceived to behave unethically - then the rest of the Department members will face unwanted and probably unfair classification, as well. Always try to keep detachment as the key concept. Maintaining a distance from your students, does not mean that you cannot show concern and/or interest in their personal lives, but it does mean that your should consider carefully the web of consequences involved in moving into the students' private lives in such a way that you become a dependent part of them.

There is one cautionary note that should be introduced and stressed at this point. In solving each and every one of the above problem situations, it may be necessary to move from a democraticized classroom situation to an authoritarian one. The latter situation muffles the incessant talker, the neurotic, the disputant and (unfortunately) even the advanced student. This generalized solution to these problems, however, could also effectively muzzle useful and constructive discussion, questioning and participation in the same classroom by the majority of the students in it. A fine line needs to be drawn here between all out anarchy and all out authoritarianism. Remember, it sometimes takes some effort to generate the required trust and confidence students need to participate in a class. When the fear of authority is manifest, then the effect can be to decrease or even eliminate all student participation. If you support a more democratized classroom situation, as I do, then you will have to lay out some ground rules at the beginning which set out the obligations that the students face in maintaining a democratized setting and the problem situations which could lead to the destruction of this most useful situation. We do not favour moving to an authoritarian solution except under the most extreme situations.

6. CONCLUSION

We have not dealt with all the problems a teaching assistant or a lecturer could conceivably face, but rather concentrated on some that seem most likely to arise. It may happen that you face none of these situations. Do not be disappointed if this is the case. Do not think you need to go looking for problems where there are none. It may take several stints as a teaching assistant before you encounter any of these problems. A good working relationship with the faculty member conducting the course or with the chairman of the Department is crucial to the solution to some of these problems.

The collective wisdom of others who have encountered similar situations is very useful to determining a viable resolution. Also the resolution of these situations is the clear need to make public the ethical standards for satisfactory academic performance and conduct in a seminar or lecture situation. The student may in some cases be genuinely confused as the application of these standards may be perceived to vary from Department to Department or from course to course. Finally, you may find it useful to look at the section on Correspondence Courses and the special set of problems involving distance education students.

7. POSTSCRIPT

We have not said all there is to be said about the variety of ways of improving the teaching of introductory philosophy courses. There are others ways of improving this teaching not extensively covered in this book. For example, TA workshops are very useful for airing individual problems and improving teaching techniques. In these workshops model discussion groups are set up centering on particular topics or areas in philosophy. Sample test evaluations are carried out with a comparison between standards of evaluation. One paper can be xeroxed and everyone in the workshop provides an evaluation of it and then defends her evaluation. A senior faculty member operates as a useful resource critiquing the evaluations and the operation of the sample discussion groups as well as providing practical insights for improving these TA functions. To supplement these workshops or as an integral part of them, visiting speakers can be invited to discuss practical aspects of teaching particular courses in philosophy particularly at the introductory level. These procedures could be followed in conjunction with this text and this text could be used as the outline for topics to be covered in such workshops.

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APPENDIX I

Riegle's Question Classification System

Interrogative Questions: Sentences with an interrogative function, regardless of form. A. Empirical: Questions about the world and our experiences of it.

1. Causal: Questions about the cause of something. (a) Why did the pond freeze?, (b) What caused World War I?

2. Teleological: Questions about someone's purpose, aim or goal. (a) Why did Nixon visit China? (b) Why did Trudeau resign?

3. Functional: Questions about something's function. (a) Why does the liver secrete bile? (b) What is the function of the pancreas?

4. Non-normative Judgment: Requests for an estimate, prediction, ranking, or grading but not value judgments. (a) How far is the green? (b) Who will win the election? (b) Is the second note higher or lower than the first?

5. Descriptive: Requests for descriptions.

(a) Requests for properties or characteristics. (a) What color is it? (2) What are the properties of iron?

(b) Requests for examples. (1) What are some examples of homonyms? (2) Give me a substance that dissolves in water.

(c) Requests for classifications. (1) Is NaOH an organic or inorganic compound? (2) What class of animals does the cat belong to?

(d) Requests for labels or names. (1) Who is the President of France? (2) Which part of the brain is the lowest?

(e) Requests for summaries. (1) Summarize chapter three. (2) What are the major points of this book?

(f) Requests for reviews. (1) What have we said so far? (2) What did the author say about ecology?

(g) Requests for procedures or processes. (1) How is sulphur mined? (2) How did you get the answer to this problem?

(h) Requests for chronological sequences. (1) List in chronological order the events leading up to World War I. (2) What sequence of events preceded Coolidge becoming President?

(i) Requests for relationships. (1) What is the relationship between the Big Dipper and the North Star? (2) How is spelling ability related to reading ability?

(j) Requests for comparisons. (1) Compare Alabama to Auburn. (2) What do these words have in common?

(k) Requests for contrasts. (1) Contrast materialism and idealism. (2) What is the difference between inorganic and organic compounds?

B. Analytic: Questions about the relationship between verbal, logical, or mathematical symbols.

(1) Linguistic: Requests for definitions or the relationship between words. (a) Define placid. (b) What does 'ambiguous' mean?

(2) Logical: Requests for the laws of logic or the relationship between logical symbols. (a) Why is this argument invalid? (b) Does that conclusion follow?

(3) Mathematical: Requests for the laws of mathematics or the relationship between mathematical symbols. (a) What is 6 X 7? (b) Why does angle A plus angle B equal 180 degrees?

C. Normative Judgment: Requests for evaluations, obligatory judgments, or justifications.

(1) Is Gerald Ford a good President?
(2) Should 'Deep Throat' be banned?

D. Preference: Questions about likes and dislikes.

(1) Do you like ice cream?
(2) Don't you like coming to school?

E. Metaphysical: Questions about supernatural beings, events, etc., which have no agreed upon method for arriving at an answer.

(1) Does God exist? Why is there something rather than nothing?